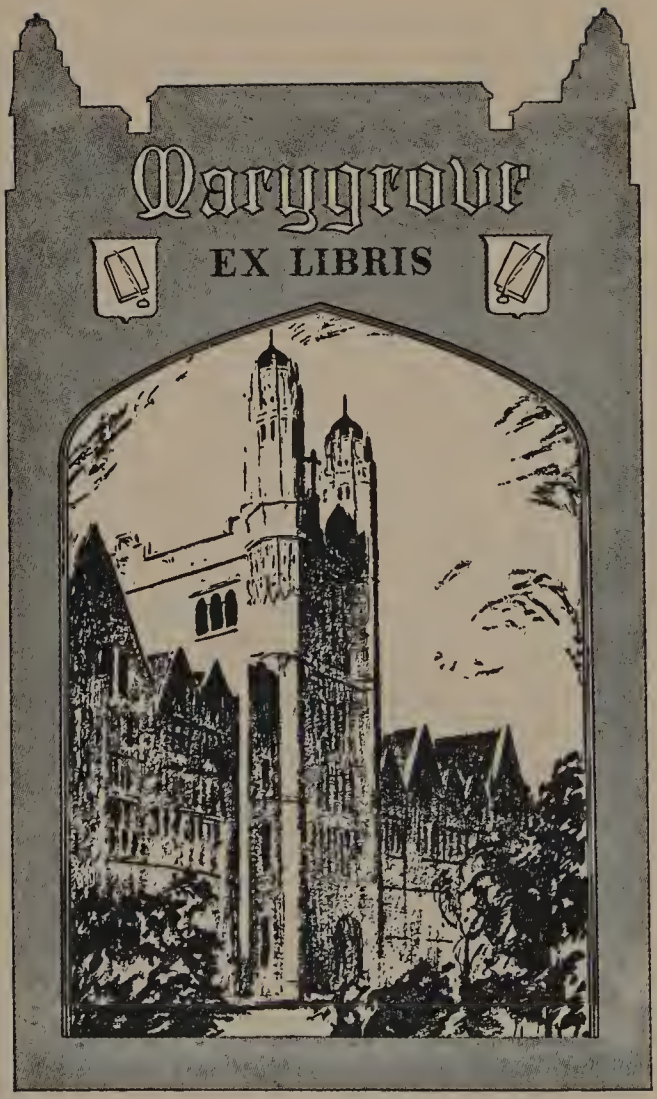
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THE WAY OF THE DRAMA

STUDY OF DRAMATIC FORMS AND MOODS

BY

BRUCE CARPENTER, M. A.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
WASHINGTON SQUARE COLLEGE, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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TO MY MOTHER

PREFACE

This book is intended primarily as a practical text to be used in classes in appreciation of contemporary drama. It may also be used in courses dealing with special drama periods, though it undertakes no thorough period study. It is not a book on playwriting; it does, however, contain an exposition of the principles of the various kinds of drama. It is intended more for audiences than for creators — for those who wish to attend plays and to read them with intelligent enjoyment.

In addition, the book is for people who are not in college but who are interested in the drama and wish to know more about it. It should be found applicable to clubs and drama groups as well as to individuals.

The book is based partly on an academic study of drama and playwriting, partly on professional stage experience, and partly on practical teaching of college students and general culture groups in and about New York City. This teaching developed in a natural way. A few years ago, while giving a series of lectures in the Newark Institute of Arts and Sciences, I happened to make some allusions to standard and current plays and the art of the drama. I was requested to give a course on the subject and did so. My establishment of the course in my own college took place two years later. The course has grown so rapidly that I now find myself with several hundred students divided into varying groups, both in the college and outside of it. I absolutely require a special textbook, and not being able to get one to meet my needs, I

have written one. If any other teacher can find a use for it, I am more than repaid for my labor.

It will be noted that throughout the book I have used a conversational style. I have not found that the principles of Aristotle are any the less profound for being expressed in simple, everyday vernacular, and often they are thus rendered more intelligible to the modern student. I have used first and second person pronouns just as I use them in my lectures, for I find that they give a more vital and immediate connotation to the material.

I am aware of the fact that the foundations of the book are not new. If they were, they would be questionable, since they comprise the basal laws on which the whole art of the drama is believed to rest. I have merely attempted for purposes of practical study to gather into one volume what usually has to be culled from many. I have not scrupled to interpolate essays, sermons, criticisms, and biographical or autobiographical examples deriving all the way from Aeschylus to the local ashman. Because of the divisional headings, however, it is quite easy to avoid these and concentrate on the more standard material.

I should like to acknowledge indebtedness to the following:

First: my students, the victims of trial and error, who have through their patience helped to bring a chaotic work into some semblance of order.

Second: my dean, Dr. James B. Munn, and the head of my department, Professor Homer A. Watt, whose visions go far enough beyond the realms of the executive and scholarly to permit so irregular a work as mine to develop. To Professor Watt I also owe many valuable suggestions for the presenting of my material.

Third: three of my teachers at Harvard, Professor George Pierce Baker, Professor Bliss Perry, and Dean

Emeritus LeBaron Russell Briggs, who taught me that art, scholarship, and humanity are not incompatible.

Fourth: my friend, Mr. Robert Lowe Hall, whose penetrating and constructive criticism has improved the better parts of this book and made the poorer less objectionable.

Fifth: my assistant, Miss Josephine Suriano, Instructor in English at Washington Square College, who gathered academic flowers in the form of bibliography and reminded me of all the little things I had forgotten to write in and a lot more I had better write out.

B. C.

TO THE TEACHER

In compiling this material for publication I have had in mind two aims: first, the practical presentation to students and laymen of the general principles of drama, together with recommendations for the study of those principles in representative plays; second, the furnishing to teachers of a textbook that not only contains the fundamentals of the subject, accessibly arranged, but that offers opportunities and suggestions for individual teaching to meet individual needs.

Each chapter deals with the *nature* and *study* of a given subject. Definitions are supplied wherever possible, and each term of the definition is explained in detail (with examples when advisable); the term itself is placed in bold type indicating a *divisional heading*. The page index contains an alphabetical list of these *divisional headings*. Where practical definitions are not possible (as with the word "comedy" and with what I designate "moods" of the drama in distinction to "forms"), I have given specific descriptions labeled with their appropriate *divisional headings*. This not only tends to make clear the various divisions and sub-divisions, but makes them easy to locate and provides an outline for teaching or for study and review.

No attempt is made to supply a complete historical survey; but those periods which particularly emphasize the kind of drama under discussion, or which were particularly instrumental in its development, are taken up chronologically. The presentation of them is compressed,

and emphasis is placed upon definite plays which are discussed and recommended for reading.

At the end of each chapter is a double bibliography, one half devoted to plays illustrating the material of the chapter, the other half devoted to critical works on that material. From this bibliography may be selected plays for further study or to take the place of those suggested in the body of the chapter; the second half of the bibliography may supply suggestions for individual lines of procedure. This arrangement enables a teacher to shift his emphasis or to dwell more fully upon any phase of the work he deems necessary.

In addition, a *general* bibliography will be found at the end of the book. This contains first, a list of bibliographical works; second, a list of play collections; third, a list of important dramatists with commentaries; fourth, a list of works on dramatists in general; fifth, a list of works on the drama in general.

Each of the first eleven chapters closes with a list of topics on the material of that chapter. These topics may be used either by the student for purposes of reports and special study, or by the teacher as suggestions for additional treatment.

It will be noticed that the chapters are not uniform in length. Those which are most important and complicated have received space in proportion to their needs. Those which are simple (such as the one on melodrama) and require little attention in a book of this sort are treated briefly; they are given separate chapter divisions merely for purposes of clarity and order, their bibliographies, of course, being correspondingly short. The chapters on romanticism and realism I know could well be extended to volumes; but I feel that any one interested in a detailed study of these subjects may more profitably employ books especially devoted to them. There is no separate chapter

on classicism, this subject forming a sub-division of the chapter on tragedy; nor is there a separate chapter for fantasy, which is included in the chapter on romanticism.

To increase the practical usefulness of this book, I have compiled a companion volume entitled, *A Book of Dramas*. These are plays which I have found especially valuable for illustration in my own teaching. They are selected as examples of the various forms and moods discussed in the present book and are arranged to corrrespond with its chapter divisions. For the convenience of students, footnotes are attached to play discussions in *The Way of the Drama* to indicate those plays contained in *A Book of Dramas*. The anthology may be augmented by the "World Drama Series" of Robert Metcalf Smith.[1]

B. C.

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[1] Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York, 1928.

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"Nay, Mr. Lysidas, you overwhelm us with your fine words. Pray, do not seem so learned. Humanize your discourse a little, and speak intelligibly."

Molière.

Chapter I

"THE PLAY'S THE THING"

I — The Nature of a Play.

I do not believe in definitions except as convenient handles.[1] Exactly as the man who runs an automobile is supposed to understand what its levers control, so the student who uses a definition should have clearly in mind what its terms signify. A mere memorizing of it for the purpose of giving it out again on an examination paper is valueless. The student soon forgets the words, and the course in which he learned them becomes merely another set of "points" toward his degree. I use definitions sparingly in this book, and advise the student to "absorb" their essence, after which he can re-create them in his own words.

Definition of a play.

There are many good definitions of a play, and the choosing of one or another depends upon its suitability to our individual requirements. Early definitions are founded on Aristotle, and even in modern times, such a man as W. T. Price uses as a basis the Aristotelian terms of "imitation" and "action." [2] Professor Baker has an ex-

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[1] "It is one of the maxims of the civil law that *definitions are hazardous.* Things modified by human understandings, subject to varieties of complication, and changeable as experience advances knowledge, or accident influences caprice, are scarcely to be included in any standing form of expression, because they are always suffering some alteration of their state." Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler,* No. 125.

[2] "A drama is the imitation of a complete action, adapted to the sympathetic attention of man, developed in a succession of continuously in-

cellent definition founded on the receptivity of the audience. He says that drama is a "presentation of an individual or group of individuals so as to move an audience to responsive emotion of the kind desired by the dramatist and to the amount required." [3] My own definition is but a carrying out of these ideas to coincide with my emphasis on *form.*

A play is a dramatic and characterized presentation of a story through the mediums of dialogue and action.

Presentation.

Let us take first the word "presentation." Suppose I ask you to go to the library and get Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Can you do it? You can get me a working map from which I may create a performance such as was given under Shakespeare's own direction, or under Mr. John Barrymore's. But you cannot get me *Hamlet.* At eight-thirty every week-day evening in New York City some three score plays are born or re-born, and at eleven o'clock they die. What exist in between are only sets of directions. Of course, I may sit in my library chair and derive much pleasure from reading a "script"; but, as I read, I must build in my imagination the entire production.[4] I must see the stage setting, picture the costumes, faces, actions, and expressions of the actors. I must hear their voices. If I cannot do these things, I can get nothing out of the script.

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teresting and continuously related incidents, acted and expressed by means of speech and the symbols, actualities, and conditions of life." *The Technique of the Drama,* p. 1.

[3] *Dramatic Technique,* p. 46.

[4] "In reading dramatic works we are accustomed ourselves to supply the representation." S. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature.* John Black translation, p. 32.

That is why many people are incapable of reading plays and why reading them is an acquired art, the same as music reading. At the premier of a play written by a friend of mine I heard a well-known manager behind me say, "I turned that manuscript down two months ago because I thought the setting was a damp cellar four feet below the street level, with fungus clinging to the walls and dismal shadows everywhere." Yet that manuscript definitely described the characters in gay clothes, stepping over the doorsill from the street, and a blazing Spanish sunlight pouring through the windows. The manager was not stupid; he had merely failed to *see* the setting.

The first injunction, therefore, to a student reading a play is: approach it with an open and alert mind and with imagination ready to conjure up every physical detail the printed words suggest. In this way even the so-called "closet" dramas which are not meant to be produced on an actual stage can be *seen*.

Nor can this attitude be neglected at the theatre. For Louis Bromfield's *House of Women,*[5] the set was done by that sensitive designer, Mr. Robert Edmond Jones; it gave at the rise of the curtain a complete impression of the atmosphere needed. Any one looking carefully at the room knew he would see a certain kind of people living a certain kind of life. But if he were inattentive, the set meant only a "room" any commonplace designer could throw together.

As practice in visualizing sets from the printed page try drawing plans of a few. Here is the set for S. N. Behrman's *The Second Man:* [6]

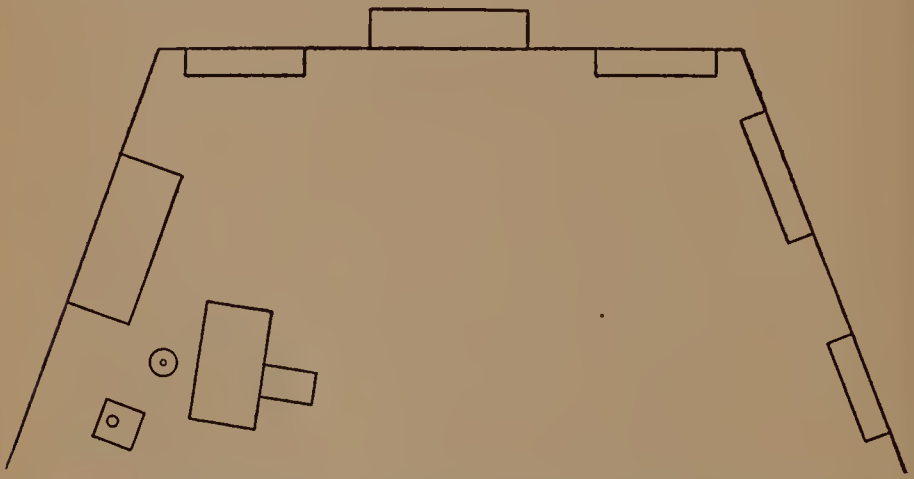
---

[5] The author's own dramatization of his novel, *The Green Bay Tree.* Produced in New York in 1927 with Nance O'Neill and Elsie Ferguson.

[6] *A Book of Dramas.*

The living-room of a duplex apartment of a studio-building on the West Side. The proscenium displaces the great windows typical of these apartments; midway up the rear wall is visible the railed landing of the stairs leading to the upper bedrooms. The great room is comfortably furnished, a slight preponderance of the "exotic" in furnishing. The walls are lined with bookshelves wherever convenient. There are books and magazines in profusion everywhere. On the right,[7] near the fireplace, is a long, low, extremely comfortable looking armchair; leaning against it is an ordinary sewing board. On the other side of this chair is a low tabouret on which repose writing materials, and a telephone. Not far from this armchair, also, just below the fireplace, is a small "portable" gramophone on a small stand.

After reading this carefully, draw a diagram in the following fashion:



You will find that your conception of the action will now be clearer and more colored by the mood of the place where it occurs. For instance, such a detail as the sewing board is now fixed in your mind and you will be able to appreciate

[7] Professionally, "right" and "left" mean *facing* the audience. A few plays, such as those of Pinero and Jones, are *printed* from the opposite

the value given to it in the play. Try to picture the way each character looks in this set, and then the gestures and expressions that accompany his speeches, as well as the varying tones of his voice and the differentiation between them and the tones of the other characters. You will thus create for yourself a "presentation" of the play which will be something far different from the printed page before you.

Characterized.

This word merely means depiction of a character in terms lifelike or true to a definite and consistent conception in the mind of the author. Good character drawing holds together throughout a play, and though much depends on the actor and director, more depends on the author. The character must do nothing in Act III that does not harmonize with his nature as revealed in Act I, unless there is some definite reason for a radical change. Often audiences, seeing a character consistent within an act, do not think back to a previous act. Either they are carried away by the thrill of the immediate situation or by the personality of the actor playing the part; they do not realize that they have been fooled. In a melodrama this does not much matter, since such a piece is not to be taken seriously; but in a play which undertakes to represent life and human nature, a major inconsistency of characterization is highly detrimental. Get into the habit of thinking a play over and asking yourself whether the characters have behaved consistently throughout.

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standpoint. The description here given does not include one or two minor pieces of furniture used in the production.

Dialogue.

The usual dictionary definition of this word will suffice. There are, of course, monologues which are sometimes called plays, such as those one finds among the works of Browning; but, strictly speaking, we have come to regard a play as something which contains more than a single character, so that the reactions of human beings to one another may be shown.

Action.

In play vernacular "action" means *movement* — not only the various physical movements of the hands, legs, and facial muscles, but a succession of the deeds they express, which with their accompanying speeches produce a cumulative interest on the part of the audience. When we say, "The action of such and such a piece is slow," we mean that its movement is slow, that the various stages of the story or characterization are not arrived at rapidly enough. A distinction must be made between *physical* action and that progress of the human mind and emotions which is the real *movement* of drama. When I was a student of playwriting there was a member of our class who could understand nothing but physical action. Every time a manuscript was read which did not contain a large amount of vigorous gymnastics, he protested that it dragged, and I remember his leaving a superb performance of Euripides and denouncing the play for its lack of "physical action."

A few years ago we depended more on external display of agitation than we do now. The old-fashioned type of George M. Cohan farce had people chasing each other in and out of doors and windows after a fashion now relegated to the movies. Even serious drama had more external ex-

citement. One school sent its heroines climbing over every piece of furniture in a room to vary the monotony of a long scene; and I can remember Mrs. Leslie Carter in the big act of *Zaza* throwing everything but the grand piano at her lover. However, may I say that I prefer even this extreme mode of expressed drama to some of our present day *repression*. A scene during which two actors stand apparently motionless for twenty minutes and talk to one another in tones audible only so far as the fourth row may be intensely impressive — but not to the major portion of the audience. A reasonable amount of physical expression will always be necessary to make a play effective, even at the sacrifice of complete naturalness.

Story.

Some years ago I asked George Arliss which he considered the most important element in a play — the problem, the characterization, or the story.[8] He answered without hesitation, "The story!" I was somewhat surprised, as in those days I was under the influence of a modern and academic school which deprecated story. I have since come to feel that he was right. Time and again some playwriting student tells me he has a "marvellous idea" for a play. I question him about it and find that he has no story to illustrate it. Often he never gets one. The play is only a character sketch, a sociological problem, or a bit of "atmosphere," and has no material body to carry it into the physical world of the theatre. Many otherwise capable writers cannot construct plots. They can invent a number of incidents through which they parade their char-

[8] It is not necessary in a book of this kind to make a technical distinction between *plot* and *story*.

acters, but the incidents have no connection with one another and prove boring. Even an incident which through characterization and good handling becomes a "situation" must be developed into a plot. The protest that real life seldom presents plots is no excuse. Ibsen took *A Doll's House* from a newspaper account of a woman who had committed a forgery. There was practically nothing in the original article which resembled the intricate web of story one finds in the finished play.

Not one newspaper account in five hundred has more than the merest germ of a plot. Suppose we take the following as an example:

POLICE RAID HOME OF WELL-KNOWN COLLEGE PROFESSOR

That will be the heading. Then will follow details of the arrival of the patrol wagon, the comments of the professor and the police, and the probable cause of the raid. Of course, the cause may be interesting and vital enough for something naturally to develop from it; but how many times would this happen? College professors are not apt to be raided, and the chances of making a real play out of such a raid without considerable invention on the part of the playwright are exceedingly slim. You may say, "It is the characterization that interests me; and the situation of a dignified and sensitive college professor in so undignified and sensational a predicament is enough. Let me merely concern myself with analyzing his feelings and the feelings of his family and of the faculty and students, and I shall be satisfied with my play." You would probably discover that you had a succession of "talky" scenes in which the professor explains how it all happened and the other characters give their opinions at length, but in

which the innate tragic or comic values are wholly obscured.

On the other hand, let us put in a little *story* and see what happens. Suppose, after the professor has successfully convinced everyone that there has been a mistake and that he has been done an injustice, the young and pretty wife of the dean is caught sneaking out of the professor's clothes closet. The dean cries, "My wife!" The professor cries, "My job!" And the curtain descends, giving the audience something to think about until the next act.

Whether a play deals with tragedy or comedy, a story is necessary, and no play that has "lived" has been without one.

Dramatic.[9,10]

I have left this word till the last because it is the most difficult to comprehend and the most important of all words connected with my subject. The definition given in most dictionaries is inadequate. They do not get at the essence of the word, and there is no synonym by which it may be described. It will be very difficult in the pages of a book

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[9] "The dramatic includes those emotions of the soul which steel themselves to will, and to do, and those emotions of the soul which are aroused by a deed or course of action; also the inner processes which man experiences from the first glow of perception to passionate desire and action, as well as the influences which one's own and others' deeds exert upon the soul; also the rushing forth of will power from the depths of man's soul toward the external world, and the influx of fashioning influences from the outer world into man's inmost being; also the coming into being of a deed, and its consequences on the human soul. . . ." Freytag, *The Technique of the Drama.* Translation by Elias J. MacEwan, p. 19.

[10] "A play is a more or less rapidly developing crisis in destiny or circumstances, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, clearly furthering the ultimate event." William Archer, *Playmaking,* p. 36.

to employ the illustration I use with my students, but I shall make an attempt, and I ask you to help me by exercising your most active imagination.

The scene is a lecture room. You assemble for a lecture on the drama. The professor is late. One of you, whom we will designate "Fred Armstrong," an easy-going young chap dressed in sweater and baggy trousers, speaks:

FRED. Where's the prof?

MISS SIMPSON [*a somewhat older student; looks severely at her watch*]. Not come yet!

FREDA FRICK [*a flapper*]. Great! Maybe we'll get a cut.

MISS SIMPSON. I've come here for work.

[*The door opens and the* PROFESSOR *enters. He makes his way to the platform.*]

PROFESSOR. Ladies and gentlemen. I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but unavoidable circumstances prevented my coming. However, we will go on with the lecture just the same. [*Takes his seat.*]

There is no interruption to his lecture for several minutes. Then one of the students asks a question about the work, which is answered conventionally.

I wonder if you would pay $3.85 to see such a play. It is a *presentation* through the mediums of *dialogue* and *action,* and it might be the beginning of a *story.* Also, it has *characterization,* for each person speaks according to kind. Yet it is not interesting. Perhaps you feel that there is no emotion. Perhaps it is emotion which makes a thing dramatic. Or perhaps it is that quality we hear so much of from practical teachers of playwriting, "suspense," or the one scholars talk about, "struggle." Let us add them all and do our little play again:

FRED. Where's the prof?

MISS SIMPSON [*raising her eyebrows*]. Not come yet! A fine way to regard his duty. [*Looks severely at her watch.*]

FREDA. Well, dearie! You should boil over!

ALBERT [*a very young boy*]. Gee! I hope we get a cut. I wanna go to the movies.

MISS SIMPSON. Well, I think it's disgraceful. He's supposed to lecture, and we're all here for that purpose, and have paid our good money, and ——

FRED [*under his breath*]. Aw! Take your fifty cents and go home.

MISS SIMPSON. What's that?

EDITH [*a nervous, high-strung girl, bursts into the room*]. Oh! Oh! It's terrible! [*She sinks into a chair.*]

ALL [*crowding round her*]. What's happened?

[*General consternation.*]

[*The door again opens, violently, and the* PROFESSOR *enters. His hair is mussed, his tie is disarranged, and his face bears a wild, tragic look. He stands for a moment, gasping and muttering, "My God!" Then he staggers to the platform. The students rush forward to aid him; but he waves them back.*]

PROFESSOR [*after a moment, begins to speak in a broken and heart-rending voice*]. Ladies — and gentlemen! I — I'm sorry to have kept you waiting — but unavoidable circumstances — [*He looks down at a ring on his hand.*] — prevented my coming. . . . However — [*He steadies himself and with an effort pronounces.*] We will go on with the lecture — just the same!

[*Takes his seat and begins.*]

How do you feel about this? Is it worth $3.85? I doubt if you feel so. Yet we have added emotion, suspense, and the professor's internal struggle. Perhaps you think it is overdone; but to tone it down would avail nothing. It does not satisfy because it is not *dramatic.*

Now let me have your patience once more, and we will do it for the last time.

FRED. Where's the prof?

MISS SIMPSON [*raising her eyebrows*]. Not come yet! A fine way to regard his duty. [*Looks severely at her watch.*]

FREDA. Well, dearie! You should boil over!

ALBERT [*a very young boy*]. Gee! I hope we get a cut. I wanna go to the movies.

MISS SIMPSON. Well, I think it's disgraceful. He's supposed to lecture, and we're all here for that purpose, and have paid our good money, and ——

FRED [*under his breath*]. Aw! Take your fifty cents and go home.

MISS SIMPSON. What's that?

EDITH [*a nervous, high-strung girl, bursts into the room*]. Oh! Oh! It's terrible! [*She sinks into a chair.*]

ALL [*crowding round her*]. What's happened?

[MARY DANE *comes in. She is a quiet girl to whom the other students look instinctively.*]

MARY. Please take your seats, and don't let him see you know anything about it.

OTHERS. What's happened?

MARY. You remember that girl he married last year?

FRED. Yes! Grace Browne! She was a senior.

FREDA. Now what in the name of mud has she pulled off?

FRED [*frowning*]. Stow it!

MARY. Well! She's just been run over and killed. They're trying to keep him from coming here; but he says he must, or he'll go to pieces. [*She looks hastily toward the door.*] For mercy's sake, don't let on!

[*The students take their seats.*]

[*There is a pause. Then the door opens slowly and the* PROFESSOR *enters. He is not disheveled, and he is exerting every effort to control himself. He falters a moment at the edge of the platform, then goes to his table. Begins to speak.*]

PROFESSOR. Ladies and gentlemen! I — I am sorry to have

kept you waiting. [*He pauses and looks down at a ring on his finger. Catches himself and covers the ring with his other hand. Looks directly at the students.*] But unavoidable circumstances prevented my coming. . . . However — we will go on with the lecture — just the same — [*Takes his seat and begins.*]

Do you notice any difference? Suppose the lecture were to continue, with looks and comments of suspense from the students, one girl suddenly giving an hysterical laugh and being silenced, the professor exerting more and more effort to master himself, until finally he breaks down completely. Granting that the scene is well written and the acting good, will not your interest hold? Will you not watch with an anxious thrill for the emotion seething under the surface until it finally bursts forth in the anguished cry of the professor? What is it that has made this change? The acting is certainly more subdued than in the previous version, and the speeches are modified; yet there is more real interest. The reason is that the scene has been *dramatized.* In other words, you were prepared, after your interest had been whetted by a small amount of suspense, for the underlying *emotional significance* of the drama.

You therefore began to interpret each thing you saw and heard. And this is where your job as an audience came in — to use your imagination and your alertness, and to miss nothing. Did you note the "business" of the professor looking down at his ring? It might have been any kind of ring. Nothing was said about its having anything to do with the tragedy. Yet did you not instantly feel a connection between it and the girl-wife who had so recently met her death? Did the thought not flash through your

mind: "There! That's something she gave him, and the pain of seeing it is too much, so he hides it?" The finest drama is filled with delicate suggestions which would be ruined if they were made obvious. The trained and sensitive theatre-goer catches them, and his enjoyment of the play is increased a thousandfold. Suppose you are sitting back in your seat, heavy after a big dinner, or your mind is on baseball or cabbages — what chance have you of perceiving any of these things? You will catch only the merest outline of the plot, only the vaguest impression of the characters. Then afterwards, when someone asks you what the "show" was about, you'll say, "Oh, it wasn't so much. A guy's wife gets killed and they all throw a fit."

Always recognize that anything in the world can be dramatized: a lead pencil, a button from a man's coat, a snatch of song floating in through a window. And if the magic process of dramatization be not accomplished, neither fire, flood, nor wholesale murder can sustain your artistic interest. An excellent instance of the dramatic value which can be given to a small, homely object occurs in Lulu Vollmer's *Sun-Up*.[11] Throughout the first act allusions are made to the young man's hoe. It is the symbol of his work and of his life on the tiny mountain farm. When he goes away to war the hoe is left standing in a corner. At the climax of the act his old mother, left alone, slowly rubs her hand over it. You know the meaning it has for her; and though she makes no outcry, and gazes upon it dry-eyed, a lump rises in your throat and you realize that a divine bit of humanity has been revealed to you. Had you not been prepared, you would have seen

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[11] Produced in New York, 1923, with Lucille LaVerne.

only a hoe, and the climax of the act would have remained undramatized.

Word pictures as well as concrete objects may be dramatized. In John Synge's *Riders to the Sea,* Maurya, the old woman, describes the bringing home of her son's body:

> I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it — and leaving a track to the door.

Later, Nora, the daughter, watches men bearing the body of the last of Maurya's sons. She says:

> They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it — and leaving a track to the door.

It is *dramatization* which makes the main distinction between life and drama. Some infinitesimal part of life is so imbued with universal meaning that you see in it the very essence of man's suffering or man's laughter. It produces an understanding of life through symbols of life.

A play is a dramatic and characterized presentation of a story through the mediums of dialogue and action.

II — The Study of a Play.

I shall take a single play and analyze it; the first act in detail, and the subsequent ones more generally. You may then analyze for yourself any other plays that seem good models. I am assuming, of course, that you are reading with me the play I analyze. I have chosen Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler,* because it is a "well-made" play. The term "well-made" has become a disparaging one of late, and I shall consider this point in connection with some of the

"new schools." Suffice to say here that an analysis of a well-made play can be clearer than an analysis of an ill-made one.

First let us consider what Ibsen had to accomplish in *Hedda Gabler,*[12] for in addition to the fundamental laws of all drama, an individual technique must be evolved for handling each individual play.

Hedda Gabler is not primarily a *story* drama, nor a drama of *atmosphere,* nor even a *problem* in the sense that *A Doll's House* is a problem. The central thing in *Hedda Gabler* is the character of Hedda. The problem, which is secondary, is what to do with Hedda in a social order that makes no allowance for people like her.

Hedda is by nature strong and self-centered, brilliant of personality, highly sexed, of delicate nervous organism, and capable of a high degree of development. Her dominant trait is, as she puts it herself, a desire for "power to mould a human destiny." [13] The last may not seem a very desirable thing; yet today such women are valuable members of society, serving in civic, professional, artistic, and domestic capacities. So long as they exercise their power with discretion and creatively, they are an asset to society. The trouble with Hedda is that in the social order in which she is placed she is given no opportunity to exercise power. Her nature, therefore, becomes perverted. Unlike a negative woman, she must leave her mark, and since she cannot do this for good, she does it for evil. George Bernard Shaw calls her "romantic." [14] She is, but that trait in her properly developed would have given strength instead of weakness. "Mis-developed," it makes her a moral coward,

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[12] *A Book of Dramas.*

[13] Act II, final scene.

[14] *The Quintessence of Ibsenism,* p. 126.

just as it made Peer Gynt one. She will not face the truth of anything, and when finally she is forced to, she breaks under the ordeal.

Now Ibsen had to consider these principal traits of Hedda, together with a great many minor ones; and since he was an artist and not a scientist, he had to think of them in terms of concrete illustration. In other words, he had to think of a *plot* which would show these traits *dramatized*. He therefore devised a story and other characters. Any one reading his preliminary notes [15] will see how faithfully he always did this, and how thoroughly he knew the full history of his characters for years before they are taken up in the first acts. Beginning his plots, as he usually did, just before the climax, he had to convey to his audience a complicated mass of antecedent history and characterization. This method of course, makes necessary more exposition but greatly heightens the dramatic tension and the swiftness of dramatic development once the action gets under way; it also makes the events we do see infinitely more significant.

Hedda is shown at the very outset a woman doomed. Her character is already perverted, and she needs only the final touch to crash into disaster. Ibsen introduces her as the new wife to a good, but weak and untalented man whom she despises. His environment is revealed through his Aunt Julia and the aging family servant. That there is nothing in it with which Hedda could have the slightest sympathy is made apparent from the beginning. She has married Tesman because she could not do better, and because she had to marry someone. In her day there was no alternative except the lot of a despised and poverty-

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[15] *From Ibsen's Workshop,* William Archer.

stricken old maid. Hedda had no dowry, and young men of her set expected one; also, her force of personality and extravagance frightened away those who wanted wives easy to manage and economical. All this is either expressed or implied in the two opening scenes[16] before Hedda's entrance.

SCENE ONE. BERTHA and AUNT JULIA.

The following information is contained in this scene:

1. The newly married couple, Hedda and Tesman, have arrived at home after their honeymoon.
2. Up to the time of his marriage Tesman has lived with Aunt Julia, who has mothered him.
3. Aunt Julia is amiable and loving.
4. Bertha, the old servant, has been transferred from Aunt Julia's house and the care of Aunt Julia's invalid sister, Rina, to the new establishment.
5. Tesman has been made a doctor of philosophy in the university.
6. Hedda is dominating and extravagant. These tendencies are shown, not through Bertha's expressed opinion of her new mistress but through her accounts of little things Hedda has done (such as ordering the chintz covers removed from the furniture in the living room).

Concrete things, like flowers and window curtains, are dramatized and made symbolic, and the atmosphere is given a warm human quality which forms a dramatic contrast to that presently created by Hedda's entrance.

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[16] "Scene" in the French sense means that which happens while one group of characters is on the stage. When a character leaves the group, or a new character joins it, we have a new "scene."

SCENE TWO. AUNT JULIA and TESMAN.

1. Tesman's weakness of character is shown in his ending many speeches with the query "Er?" as though he desired support.

2. Tesman's humdrum nature is indicated by the fact that he has continued his unexciting scholarly research during the honeymoon.

3. Tesman's worship of Hedda is revealed in his anxiety for her pleasure and comfort.

4. The "bonnet" episode, coming here, is one of the most highly dramatizing things in the act. Aunt Julia has bought a new bonnet on Hedda's account, so that Hedda need not be ashamed of her. Later we shall see how this is used.

5. The wedding trip has been long and expensive. To meet Tesman's increased expenses Aunt Julia has mortgaged the annuity belonging to her and her sister. For this purpose Judge Brack has been utilized. The mention of Judge Brack carries a slight sense of menace. This gives suspense and prepares for the later participation of the judge in the tragic events of the plot.

6. Aunt Julia hopes that Hedda will have children, but Hedda has endeavored to keep Tesman from thinking about the idea. This, of course, emphasizes further the fact that Hedda is quite out of sympathy with the family she has married into.

7. A new element is introduced in Eilert Lövborg. Implication is made of his unsteady character and the fact that a professional rivalry has existed between him and Tesman.

SCENE THREE. AUNT JULIA, TESMAN, and HEDDA.

1. Hedda is not enthusiastic about anything. She is annoyed with almost everything. She *says* she didn't sleep well; she wants a softer light, which Aunt Julia and Tesman both hasten to supply, though Aunt Julia has previously drawn the window curtains back to make the room more cheerful. The flowers sent by friends mean to Hedda only that the air is rendered oppressive.

2. Aunt Julia has saved Tesman's old slippers, much to his delight and Hedda's boredom. Hedda admits having no sentiment about such things, especially when they do not concern *her*.

3. The "bonnet" episode recurs. Hedda assumes that the bonnet is Bertha's and makes a slighting remark about it. Whether or not she really *knew* whose it was does not matter. The important thing is that she doesn't care. So she offends the old lady and then offers only the most indifferent apology. This takes Aunt Julia off in a dramatic manner and that caps the scene with excellent effect.

Technically this scene is a synthesizing of the other two. We get Hedda in *action*, proving what has been implied about her. It will be noted that no one has said a word against her. She has simply damned herself. Also, we have seen in these few minutes her complete unsuitability to her surroundings. Even if she made the best of them, she would never find here any real fulfillment; though of course, since she does not exert herself at all to meet her situation, she gets little of our sympathy. We sympathize with the Hedda that might have been, and regret the waste of good potentialities.

SCENE FOUR. TESMAN and HEDDA.

1. Hedda's "high-toned" ideas are shown in her criticism of Aunt Julia.

2. Her indifference to her husband's pleasure is revealed in her refusal to address Aunt Julia intimately.

3. Her extravagance again comes to the surface in her desire for two pianos.

4. Mrs. Thea Elvsted's name is introduced through the discovery of her flowers and the note saying that she will call again. In connection with this we learn that she was Tesman's old flame and that her splendid hair used to make Hedda jealous when they were girls at school. This latter point is used very tellingly later on.

5. The scene ends with the information that Lövborg has been living near Mrs. Elvsted. No intimation is given of their relationship, but the juxtaposition of their names helps to prepare the audience for what follows.

SCENE FIVE. TESMAN, HEDDA, and MRS. ELVSTED.

This scene introduces the Elvsted-Lövborg complication.

1. Lövborg has been a tutor to Mrs. Elvsted's stepchildren.

2. Mrs. Elvsted is concerned about Lövborg's welfare since he has returned to town. She fears a resumption of his old habits of dissipation.

3. The success of Lövborg's book is mentioned.

4. This produces a marked effect upon the Tesmans. Tesman is anxious for his own professional reputation. Hedda is irritated because someone else has made a success. The scene terminates with Hedda's "killing two

birds with one stone." She sends Tesman off to get Lövborg and turns to Mrs. Elvsted to pump her.

This scene is a splendid example of exposition in action. Also, Hedda's powers of manipulation are revealed. She both fascinates and frightens Mrs. Elvsted.

SCENE SIX. HEDDA and MRS. ELVSTED. The "pumping" scene.

1. A recurrence of the "hair" theme shows Hedda's jealousy. Mrs. Elvsted reminds her that when they were girls Hedda once threatened to burn Mrs. Elvsted's hair off.

2. Further questioning discloses Mrs. Elvsted's relation to Lövborg and her distaste for her husband. She has helped Lövborg on his book. This, of course, increases Hedda's jealousy.

3. An essential difference between the characters of the two women is evidenced. Mrs. Elvsted has left her husband openly on Lövborg's account. Hedda is not shocked, but thinks immediately of what society will say. Later in the play this fear of society becomes an important point.

4. Intimation is made that Hedda herself has had some former relationship with and influence over Lövborg. There is the story of an unknown woman who once threatened to shoot Lövborg. Mrs. Elvsted thinks this woman is a red-haired singer with whom Lövborg used to be associated. The audience, however, is left with the suspicion that Hedda is the woman. This closes the scene on a note of suspense and the anticipation of further dramatic complications.

SCENE SEVEN. HEDDA, MRS. ELVSTED, TESMAN, and JUDGE BRACK.

This is a short scene merely introducing Judge Brack

and getting Mrs. Elvsted off the stage. It contains a dramatic quality, however, in Hedda's coquetry with the Judge, who is an old friend.

SCENE EIGHT. TESMAN and JUDGE BRACK.

Here is contained a necessary statement of the precarious money situation of the Tesmans, and the implication that Lövborg's book and rivalry are going to be bad for Tesman.

SCENE NINE. TESMAN, BRACK, and HEDDA.

1. The fact that Tesman's position may depend upon a competition with Lövborg receives further development. The dramatic value lies in the effect of the news upon Tesman and Hedda, who take it each in character. For Tesman it means anxiety. For Hedda it has a "sporting interest." Again her selfishness is emphasized as well as her impracticality when she refuses to help economize.

2. Incidentally the fact is revealed that Judge Brack is giving a bachelor party that evening to which Tesman is invited.

SCENE TEN. TESMAN and HEDDA.

Additional reaction to the news is given.

1. Tesman is worried but has a childlike faith that it will all come out right if they economize.

2. Hedda's further attitude toward economy is disclosed. She enumerates the things she will have to give up.

3. Hedda reveals as her consolation the one thing she has left to "kill time" with — General Gabler's pistols. Though a moral coward, she is not a physical one; in this respect she is the true daughter of her father. Tesman's physical fear, in comparison, is ludicrously pathetic.

The scene and act end on this note, which is exceedingly

poignant. And it has been prepared for. The story of the woman who once threatened to shoot Lövborg is now remembered, and the pistols are given added importance. In fact, we learn a bit later that it was one of these very pistols which was utilized in the threat, and still later they become the instruments that produce the deaths of Lövborg and Hedda. They are also of symbolic significance. They represent all the heritage the general has passed down to his daughter — a heritage of romantic bravery and recklessness that is destined to end in destruction.

The act as a whole has no succession of startling events. A hasty reading makes it seem tame, for the characters apparently do nothing but *talk*. However, the moment you read carefully and with emotional alertness; or, better yet, the moment you see the act *produced*, you realize its cumulative dramatic quality. A comparison might be made with the first act of such a play as *The Front Page*.[17] In this latter piece there is no rising dramatic quality. Until within two minutes of the curtain the act is completely static, and the interest is maintained solely through novelty and naturalness of atmosphere. The characters are types and have no development; one knows as much about them at the end of five minutes as at the end of the play. Moreover, the situations are not organic and remain merely a series of cogs in the plot machinery. The thing which makes the first act (as an act) possible is the climax. This climax, coming suddenly and unexpectedly, is a "thriller"; but it is not, as with the first act climax of "Hedda Gabler," a culmination of all that has gone before.

I shall not outline scene by scene the subsequent acts of

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[17] A popular New York success of 1928.

Hedda Gabler, though this may be profitably done by the student, but I shall continue the discussion more generally.

ACT II.

1. The first part of Act II is devoted to a succession of small scenes with Hedda, Tesman, and Judge Brack. These scenes further emphasize the points of character already "planted" and fix in the minds of the audience the details of the general situation.

2. Lövborg is introduced. In addition, we are given the information concerning his "new book." Dramatically the scene moves forward because of Hedda's interest in Lövborg. Intermittently he is left alone for a few words with her, and each time the tension is increased as her old power over him and her exultation in it are revealed.

3. Mrs. Elvsted enters the scene. This situation, being prepared for, has added significance, and when it is properly acted it is superb. Hedda, seating herself between Lövborg and Mrs. Elvsted, manipulates them and brings about both the breaking of Lövborg's temperance resolve and the arousal of his suspicion that Mrs. Elvsted does not trust him. Hedda sends him off to the party with her husband and Judge Brack.

4. Alone with Mrs. Elvsted, Hedda glories in her triumph. She predicts that at ten o'clock Lövborg will return, "flushed and fearless." She boasts that *she* believes in him even if Mrs. Elvsted does not. Mrs. Elvsted, newly alarmed, asks what Hedda's motive is. It is here that Hedda replies, "I want for once in my life to have the power to mould a human destiny." She laughs, hysterically, and threatens to burn off Mrs. Elvsted's hair.

Mrs. Elvsted begs to go away. "Nonsense," cries Hedda. "First you shall have a cup of tea, you little stupid. And then — at ten o'clock — Eilert Lövborg will be here — with vine-leaves in his hair."

Act III.

1. This act has throughout an ominous quality; the early part is apparently quiet, but there is an undercurrent of approaching tragedy. Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted have waited all night for the others to return, and Mrs. Elvsted is terrified over Lövborg's dissipation. Hedda, apparently calm, seems waiting, cat-like. Tesman arrives with Lövborg's manuscript and confides to Hedda that Lövborg, drunk, has dropped it on the way from the judge's party. Hedda's reaction on learning that it is the only copy shows, not definite decision, but recognition of an opportunity. It may be compared with the accumulation of suggestions received by Macbeth in the early part of Shakespeare's drama before Macbeth has definitely made up his mind to kill Duncan.[18] During the remainder of this act we see the idea of destruction formulating in Hedda's mind. Tesman receives word that his invalid aunt is dying, and Hedda bustles him off. She gets possession of the manuscript.

2. Brack arrives. He is jealous of Lövborg's interest in Hedda, since he has from the beginning been interested in her himself. He relates how Lövborg has gone from his house to that of the red-haired singer where a fight has resulted with police interference. He tries to turn Hedda

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[18] Some authorities, such as the German Bodenstedt, feel that Macbeth is a "murderer in thought" from the very beginning. Professor George Lyman Kittredge and others do not agree with this.

against Lövborg. Some critics have objected to this portion of the play, saying that Brack becomes a melodramatic villain. As with most of Ibsen, the proof lies in the playing of the scene. If an intelligent actor plays Brack, and not a "genteel heavy" as the old-fashioned melodrama villains used to be called, the effect is artistic.

3. The same criticism applies to the next scene, between Hedda, Mrs. Elvsted, and the now sobering Lövborg. Lövborg thinks he has lost his manuscript in the red-haired woman's establishment, and if the actor playing him brings out just the right shade of romantic despair, the part is kept from sounding stilted and forced. This romantic despair makes him tell Mrs. Elvsted he has torn up the manuscript; he does not want her to learn the sordid truth since she looks upon the book as his child and hers.

4. The "child" idea sticks in Hedda's mind and takes hold of her own unsound romanticism. Why not, she tells herself, appease her jealousy and assert her power by striking through the "child." On learning that Lövborg wishes to make an end of himself, this same romanticism prompts her to beg that he "do it beautifully." In a burst of perverted ego she even goes so far as to give him one of her father's pistols.

5. Left alone, Hedda gets the manuscript and burns it in the fireplace:

> Now I am burning your child, Thea! Burning its curly locks! . . . Your child and Eilert Lövborg's. I am burning — I am burning your child.

There are few climaxes in dramatic literature so powerful as this, few that rise so steadily and unfalteringly out of the very soul of a character.

ACT IV.

1. Act IV is no mere winding up of affairs. A bitter irony permeates the early scenes, especially where Hedda tells Tesman of burning the manuscript and says she has done it to protect him from a rival. Then, having received a suggestion from Aunt Julia, she plays upon his sentimentality and vanity still further by intimating that she is going to have a child. Tesman quite confuses his ethical values and connives with her deed by agreeing to keep it secret.

2. Mrs. Elvsted returns with vague and frightening reports of Lövborg. The tension is increased by Brack's arrival and his information that Lövborg has shot himself. Hedda, reckless in her finally satisfied ego, shows that she knows something of the matter and declares that there is "beauty" in the suicide.

3. Now comes the first blow to Hedda, the reaping of her harvest. Mrs. Elvsted produces Lövborg's manuscript notes and announces that the book may be reconstructed from them. Tesman offers his services, and Hedda is forced to see them building up again the thing she had risked so much to destroy.

4. The second and more fatal blow comes when Brack informs her that Lövborg has really not killed himself as she had romantically hoped, but has been found murdered in the house of the red-haired singer with whom he has had a vulgar row. (The row has been over the manuscript, though the judge does not know this.) Even the manner of death is sordid, for Lövborg has been shot in the "bowels."

"Oh, what curse is it," cries Hedda, "that makes everything I touch turn ludicrous and mean?"

She then learns from the judge that her pistol has been confiscated by the police who will look for the owner. So long as the judge says nothing, Hedda is safe. If he tells, she will be involved in scandal — a thing she fears excessively. That she, whose greatest desire was to exert power over someone else, should now be subjected to another's will is unbearable.

5. Tesman arranges that Mrs. Elvsted shall live with Aunt Julia and that he will come over every night and work on the manuscript. Judge Brack will keep Hedda company. This, of course, plays right into the judge's hands. He paints a picture of their getting on "so capitally" together.

6. Hedda is behind the curtains. A shot rings out. They find her with a bullet hole in her temple. She has done it "beautifully."

This play, despite charges of "tricky" technique, has held through the years. A dozen times it has been pronounced "antiquated"; and a dozen times it has been revived and found as effective as ever. It is the most popular of Ibsen's dramas. Hardly a season passes without some production of it. The list of Heddas in our country includes Mrs. Fiske, Alla Nazimova, Emily Stevens, Clare Eames, Eva Le Gallienne, and Blanch Yurka; while in Europe almost every prominent emotional actress has essayed the rôle. *Hedda Gabler* is a sure proof that Ibsen *plays*.

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Topics for Reports and Special Study.

1. Analysis of a well written play.
2. The dramatic qualities in some play.
3. The handling of "suspense" in *Trifles.*
4. The characterization in *The Silver Cord.*
5. The way in which "thrills" are obtained in *The Green Goddess.*
6. How the characters of *Street Scene* are brought into the story to make a unified whole.
7. An application of the idea of "presentation" to some play both seen and read.

8. An essay on the use of dialogue by William Somerset Maugham or Oscar Wilde.
9. A criticism of either a good production of a bad play or a bad production of a good play.
10. The "action" in *Hindle Wakes*.
11. The handling of "story" in *John Ferguson*.
12. The "drama" of *A Doll's House* as distinguished from the "problem."

Chapter II

TRAGEDY

I — The Nature of Tragedy.

Before I define tragedy let me preach a short sermon on its reception. If you are one of those people who say, "I don't like depressing things. I work hard all day, and when at night I go to the theatre, I want to be cheered up." [1] — then my sermon is especially for you. There is nothing depressing in any good tragedy ever written. I may even go so far as to say that a tragedy can be thoroughly cheering, not because it reminds you, Pollyanna fashion, that you're better off than the characters in the play, but because it does something more subtle and fundamental.

Two thousand years ago Aristotle said that the purpose of tragedy is to purge the soul through pity and fear.[2] You see a set of characters suffering out of proportion to their deserts, and it arouses your pity. You see calamity coming upon someone like yourself, and it arouses your fear. A process of emotional purgation takes effect in you, much the same as the *sublimation* through which modern psy-

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[1] "If a nation has been accustomed to only one type of play — comic and gay — and we should suggest to it another kind — serious and pathetic — do you know, my friend, what would be thought of the matter? I am greatly in error if intelligent people, after recognizing its possibilities would not say: 'Of what good is this new type? Does not life bring us enough real sorrows without our further inventing imaginary ones? Why allow sadness to enter into our pleasures? That nation would speak like people unacquainted with the pleasure of being touched and moved to tears'." Denis Diderot, Oeuvres Complètes, tome IV, *Théâtre,* "Des Genres Dramatiques," I, p. 437.

[2] *Poetics,* c. 350 B.C.

chologists rid their patients of "suppressed desires." I will not join the scholars in their disputations over Aristotle's exact meaning; but I will say that there probably lurked in his mind behind the "purgation theory" consciousness that the moment you express an individual misfortune in terms of universality it attains significance and grandeur and produces a strengthening effect upon the soul.

Now this universalizing process is very difficult in actual life. Observe the effect on the public of any current calamity. A sensational crime produces millions of avid tabloid readers, but they are neither mentally nor spiritually the better for their surfeit. They secure only crude and ugly details untouched by any affiliation with the cosmic. But in *art* all this is different. I can best explain by reminding you of Plato's conception of *reality*. The chair in which you are sitting is a three-dimensional, tangible thing. You *call* it "real." You can feel it, see it, and apply to it other senses for proof. But it is not so real as the *idea* of a chair which had to precede its manufacture. You can touch a match to your actual chair and put it out of existence; but you cannot destroy the *idea* of it. That idea will never perish, and from it you can produce thousands of other chairs. This is why Plato calls ideas, or "ideals" (for here the two are synonymous), the greatest *realities*.

A play is an *idea of life*. It is created in the mind of its author from what he has seen, read, or experienced. It is immortal and has the nobility of all immortal things. And it is far greater than the individual actuality from which it sprang, because it represents and interprets *all* the actualities of that category. *You,* seeing it, find yourself a part of its universality, and you are *purged* of such feel-

ings as loneliness, shame, pettiness, and bitterness. This makes art, in the true sense of the phrase, *real life.*

Let me give you an example.

One hot summer day in New York I saw a crowd standing about a corpulent street sweeper. He had just suffered a stroke of apoplexy. Someone put in a call for an ambulance. From a barber shop nearby a chair was brought out on which he was placed, and the barber's young assistant held his shoulders. When the ambulance arrived, the interne discovered that the street sweeper was dead. He refused to take the body since this was not his official job. The ambulance drove off. The barber's assistant threw a sheet over the dead man and continued to stand holding him in the chair till relief should come.

Now suppose that story appeared in the papers. There would be, perhaps, a lurid description of the purplish countenance of the dying man, his last gasps for breath, the glassy look in his eyes. There would be an invective against the city official who had displayed so little humanity, and there might be a sentimental "puff" for the young boy who alone had given assistance. The tale would be unpleasant and painful to read. Yet suppose some real artist had written it into a tragic play. Suppose he had created not merely that particular street sweeper, but anyone who might die in a city street in the hot sun; and had shown the vulgar curiosity of human crowds and the callous indifference of civic officials, with the shame that these traits should dominate others; and then, finally, had revealed the joy that one human soul at least possessed sublimity. Suppose he had drawn a magic line to that soul — disclosed it in the half-grown lad in his shirt sleeves with his hands on the stilled, sheeted figure, and

his eyes looking out over the heads of those about him. This picture would show something of the worst and best that human nature has to offer, and the artist would have preserved it for all time — in beauty. If we do not come away from his play *strengthened* and *happy,* there is something seriously the matter with our own relations to humanity.[3]

Definition of a tragedy.

A tragedy is a play in which the treatment is serious, profound, and lofty, and the ending is both disastrous and inevitable.

Assuming, of course, the definition of a *play* already given, let us consider the attributes of tragedy. Volumes have been written on this subject, the early ones founded principally on Aristotle,[4] but for modern practical usage I have evolved the foregoing.

Treatment.

At the outset a distinction must be made between *treatment* and *subject matter,* or between *form* and *content.* It is never the subject matter that determines the genre of

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[3] "The English writers of tragedy are possessed with a notion, that when they represent a virtuous or innocent person in distress, they ought not to leave him till they have delivered him out of his troubles, or made him triumph over his enemies. This error they have been led into by a ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism, that they are obliged to an equal distribution of rewards and punishments, and an impartial execution of poetical justice. Who were the first that established this rule I know not; but I am sure it has no foundation in nature, in reason, or in the practice of the ancients." Addison, *The Spectator,* Monday, April 16, 1711.

[4] Aristotle says that tragedy is an artistic imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of an adequate magnitude. By "imitation" he means the *representation* of an *idea* of life. *Poetics,* Cooke translation, p. 17.

a play. Some subjects lend themselves more readily to tragedy and some more readily to comedy; but no subject capable of one treatment is incapable of the other. Take, for instance, Synge's "Playboy of the Western World." This play deals with murder; yet it is treated as comedy and it elicits laughter from the audience. "Young Woodley" treats seriously the adolescence which Booth Tarkington handles as comedy. It is not the privilege of the audience to insist on one treatment or another. They must accept the one offered — though having done so, they have a right to demand that the treatment remain consistent. Many a careless or inexperienced playwright, having no preconceived notion of his own attitude toward his subject, begins with one form and ends with another.[5] This is thoroughly unpardonable because unfair. If a playwright has aroused one set of emotions in his audience and then turns abruptly and makes demands upon antithetical emotions, he is slapping his audience in the face. He has betrayed their trust and deserves only their contempt.

This does not mean that tragedy and comedy cannot be combined in one work of art. Plenty of examples prove that they can be. But the elements must be blended and not inserted in separate *chunks*. Old-fashioned melodrama used to present first a serious scene between the hero and heroine and then a "funny" one between the comedian and soubrette. Modern plays are more apt to harmonize the elements as they are harmonized in life — in the same scenes, same characters, and even in the same

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[5] "If you offer to the stage anything unattempted, and venture to form a new character, let it be preserved to the last such as it set out at the beginning, and be consistent with itself." Horace, "Art of Poetry," translation by C. Smart, *The Works of Horace,* p. 306.

speeches. A distinction, however, must be made between the elements of a play and the author's attitude toward them. The elements may shift and blend as life itself shifts and blends; but the moment an author changes his attitude they become inharmonious with one another. A Pulitzer Prize play[6] had thrills, laughter, and pathos so fused that the audience was in a perpetual whirl; yet never once did Hatcher Hughes change his attitude. The characters were the same at the end as they had been at the beginning; there was no vacillation in the treatment of them.

I recall Professor Bliss Perry's illustration of the hair line between tragedy and comedy.

You are in your classroom and notice a squirrel on the campus. Along comes a dog, a young and foolish dog. He sees the squirrel, and with all his instinct for the chase makes for it. The squirrel dodges and saves itself. The dog's determination increases. He renews his attack. Again the squirrel eludes. The dog grows excited, loses his head, makes frantic dashes in all directions. The squirrel, having perhaps a sense of humor, plays with the situation. Your interest makes you forget what your professor is saying. Will the dog win, or will the squirrel? — dramatic suspense. The dog froths at the mouth and runs wild, and the squirrel takes longer and longer chances. It allows the dog almost to get it, then darts suddenly away. You hardly know whether you are roused more by the cleverness of the smaller animal or the perseverance of the larger. Suddenly comes the climax. The squirrel waits till the dog is but an inch away. The pursuer's hot breath is upon it; the two bodies seem about to merge. Then,

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[6] *Hell Bent for Heaven,* by Hatcher Hughes.

with a sharp, lightning twist, the squirrel darts up a tree. The poor dog, unable to stop himself, rushes headlong into the trunk and bumps his nose. Howling with pain and chagrin, he tucks his tail between his legs and flees from the scene. . . . Of course you laugh. You're sorry for the dog, and you appreciate the lesson he has learned. But after all, he was funny. You have witnessed a comedy.

But let us make a slight change. Suppose at the crucial moment, when the dog is almost upon his victim, the squirrel's foot slips on a small pebble, or some forgotten stiffness of joint renders the twist not quick enough. A set of huge, cruel teeth fastens upon the squirrel's slender body. There is a splintering of fragile bones. Then the final tableau — a little matted mass of fur and blood. . . . Of course, you may say it is only a dead squirrel. But a life song has ended prematurely — and all that goes with life has ended. You don't laugh. You have witnessed a tragedy.

Let us therefore regard *treatment* as differentiated from *subject matter,* and as determining the *form* of a drama.

Serious.

As a part of "serious" assume the quality of *sincerity.* I mean sincerity in the attitude of the playwright. Let him write honestly and with directness and unity of purpose. Let him not truckle to his public's prejudices, let him not evade delicate and necessary issues, let him not allow himself to be in any way diverted from the thing he has in his mind and heart. Then let us, in our turn, accept him on his own ground. Let us not demand a happy ending, or a dressing-up of some fundamental truth with pink ribbons so that we never really see it at all. Let us take the thing he has to offer as sincerely as he has given it.

Insincerity or inconsistency *outside* a play must not be confused with the same element *inside*. So long as an author carries one play through consistently, we have no right to demand that he preserve the same attitude in another play or in his private life. Dryden, for instance, has often been accused of "insincerity" because he changed his methods between plays. But we have no right to question him simply because he follows the French classical school in *All for Love* and uses a romantic looseness of treatment in *The Conquest of Granada*. These are different plays and should be considered separately.

In ideas as well as in method such shifting is permissible. A man may change his mind about things as he grows older. Also, he may be aware that there are two sides to every question, and he may write two plays, one to express each side. Such plays as *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* advocate "ideals." They ask a strict adherence to the highest the characters can aspire to. They are plays against soul-destroying compromises, against hypocrisy, against the whole tribe of mediocre standards which the "average spirit" takes refuge in. But Ibsen knew also that not everybody is capable of the *heroic* thing, that to demand too much sometimes produces destruction. So he paints in such a play as *The Wild Duck* the foolish idealist who meddles with the lives of weak people, driving them to heroisms under which they are foredoomed to perish. George Bernard Shaw calls plays of *The Wild Duck* type "anti-idealist." The whole attitude of Ibsen in them is directly antithetical to his attitude in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*. You may ask, "Why does he not show both attitudes in one play?" This is not practicable. It would be like a debate in which one man took both sides. It might

work out rationally, but it would not be dramatic. There is not room in a single play for more than one attitude, and no matter how fair a dramatist may try to be, his sympathies (at least for the time being) must incline definitely one way or the other. Galsworthy's *Strife* attempts unsuccessfully to present the arguments for both capital and labor. He should have written two plays.

Summing up, let us consider the term *serious* as a sincere, honest treatment, consistent within the play.

Profound.

Naturally, our emotions cannot be deeply stirred by a superficial treatment; but much depends upon our own capacity for depth. If we ourselves are shallow people, we cannot appreciate that which is profound. Also, it must be borne in mind that there are two kinds of profundity — *intellectual* and *spiritual.* Some simple, illiterate people are spiritually more profound than some "intelligentsia." Of course, we cannot appreciate a play like *Hamlet,* which is out of our own time and place, if we do not know the meaning of the words or something of Elizabethan atmosphere. On the other hand, there are many scholars who can analyze for us every syllable of that play but to whom its inner *spirit* is closed. I should say that profundity of both kinds is necessary; but that profundity of *soul* is the more important.

How may we increase our profundity? A grammatical analysis of "To be or not to be," or a collation of the 1603 and 1604 quartos may whet our interest so that eventually we discover the play's hidden magic. But beyond scholarship there is something more we must give. Only as we bring spiritual discernment can we perceive. And do not

think that spiritual discernment is altogether a natural gift. Some people have stronger *tendencies* toward it than others; but these tendencies must be developed or they die.

Lofty.

In its application to tragedy this word originally had a meaning different from its present one. The Greeks felt that only deeds of heroism in war and statesmanship, or the affairs of the gods were lofty enough for tragedy. "Love," which for us is the most utilized dramatic theme, was not considered dignified. Nor did their tragedy deal with heroes who were not of noble or divine birth.[7] When Euripides had the audacity to create in his *Electra* a common peasant as an important character, he was strongly censured. Even down through the Renaissance tragedies were confined to people of exalted station. The most influential of the early domestic tragedies is Lillo's *The London Merchant or The History of George Barnwell* (1731). This concerns a humble London apprentice, and it marks the beginning of a new era in subject matter and characterization.

In another sense, the word *lofty* is still a part of our definition of tragedy. Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* deals with the dregs of humanity in a foul lodging house; yet its treatment is lofty. Gorky's characters are not made to do noble deeds or to speak in an exalted way, which would render them false and ridiculous; but there is in the play, shining through it, a divine light which reminds us that

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[7] "A tragedy is the imitation of the adversity of a distinguished man. . . ." *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics,* by F. M. Padelford, pp. 58–59.

every wretched creature on the stage is part of a universal godhead. It is our place to look beyond the externals of a tragedy. If the thing we discover is genuinely spiritual, then the tragedy is *lofty*.[8]

One other point remains to be emphasized. It has been said that a playwright may create a character greater than himself in worldly station, wisdom, or personality; but that he cannot create one greater than himself in *soul*. This means that the playwright must rise to the spiritual plane of his character. Even if he falls from grace afterward or has fallen before, he must have the power to achieve one lofty moment. In like manner, an audience must be capable of achieving the moment if they are to perceive the character's loftiness.

Disastrous.

My sermon on tragedy considered the matter of disaster in general. Let us now apply the term specifically to the ending of a play. Think of all the people you know who are in a true sense "happy." Are they figures who would properly fit a tragedy? Would their lives, no matter how unfortunate in the past, make good tragic material? Not unless these misfortunes penetrated to their souls and made a lasting mark. The chances are that if they are really happy, they have not experienced genuine tragedy. How can we have an action of "adequate magnitude" if father's leg *didn't* have to be amputated after all, or Willie

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[8] "The most sorrowful figure of the Greek stage, the hapless Oedipus, was understood by Sophocles as the noble man, who in spite of his wisdom was destined to error and misery, but nevertheless through his extraordinary sufferings ultimately exerted a magical, wholesome influence on all around him, which continues effective even after his death." Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Vol. I, Haussmann translation, p. 73.

didn't fail in his lifework, or Ida's husband *didn't* run away with the waitress? You've got in those cases only a scare; and you can't touch the human soul with that. Life itself is full of genuine disaster — war, death, heart hunger. We all know it. We can't buy a morning newspaper without seeing evidences of it. And incidentally, those people who demand happy endings devour most greedily the gruesome accounts of a murder trial and spend whole social evenings exchanging tales of family illness and dire operations. Now if they can enjoy disaster in life, they ought to enjoy it when it is lifted above life and given the universal beauty of an artistic setting.

For the Greeks, disaster in tragedy usually meant *death,* and this convention has persisted down to fairly recent times. In fact, the French regard almost every serious play which has not a death ending as technically a *comedy;* and even such a piece as "Cyrano de Bergerac" is generally termed "romantic comedy." Such a distinction is not very practical; and today we feel there are many kinds of disaster other than death. Nothing could be more tragic than Mrs. Wharton's *Ethan Frome,* though all three of the principal characters are alive at the end. An ending may be regarded as disastrous when the *joie de vivre* of the leading character or characters is permanently destroyed—in other words, when some fundamental thing which was necessary for the character's happiness or peace has been forever crushed, so that life, even though it goes on, is barren of the will to live.

May I tell you a true story, the case of a Russian woman who has long been prominent in America. As a young girl she loved one of her countrymen. During their betrothal he was made a political prisoner in Siberia. For many

years she worked incessantly to secure his release, but without success. Finally, after the Revolution, he was liberated and they were married. By that time she had grown old; her life had been childless and permeated by a sense of unfulfillment. Not even a brilliant career has been compensation. She is simply one of those to whom a thwarted womanhood is the most *disastrous* thing in the world, and her story is, in consequence, a tragedy.

Inevitable.

It is not my place here to discuss the opposed philosophies of *determinism* and *free will*. If a dramatist, starting with either premise, carries his play through to a logical *inevitability,* we cannot ask more. For instance, no one expects you to believe in the old Germanic *Norns* or *Fates;* but that does not lessen their artistic value in the Wagnerian operas. The Greeks had their *Nemesis* who controlled the destinies of man, and the Greek dramatists continued to use such ominous figures long after belief in them had ceased. In the Greek trilogies visiting "the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations" had its counterpart. These trilogies dealt with the houses of Thebes or Pelops, and punishment was administered from father to son until final expiation. Eventually tragedy came to be regarded as emanating from other sources than Fate; but the sense of inevitability has remained.

Consider a popular tragic situation, the so-called "French triangle," and follow it to its conclusion. The principal characters are John Smith, his wife, Mary Smith, and their bachelor friend, Alfred Jones. Alfred, of course, is in love with Mary, and Mary is in love with Al-

fred. We shall say also that Alfred and John are business partners. Any smash-up of their business relations would bring bankruptcy, which would involve the welfare of the children. Now John does not know of the love existing between his wife and his partner, and he is not the kind of man who would consent to a divorce if he did know. What are the possibilities for an ending? (We are to assume that the love of these people is deep and permanent.)

1. Mary elopes with Alfred.
2. John learns the truth and shoots Alfred, or Mary, or himself, or all three.
3. Alfred kills himself, or John, or Mary, or all three.
4. Mary kills herself, or John, or Alfred, or all three.
5. Nobody does anything.

A sixth ending is John's convenient death; but this would not make good tragedy since it would be accidental and not something evolved out of the characters and situation. Hence, we have five possible endings. But let us begin to characterize our people more thoroughly. We'll say that murder or suicide would be unnatural for any of them; this eliminates endings two, three, and four. And we'll say that Mary would never elope, since she would not bring impoverishment to everyone concerned, incur social disgrace for herself and Alfred, make John unhappy, and cause hardship for the children. We, therefore, have but one ending left, the fifth — so it would be *inevitable*.

Premonition of evil.

This is a quality of tragedy which I did not place in the definition because it is implied by the word *inevitable*. Premonition of evil is that sense of impending disaster

which shows early in the play (sometimes at the very rise of the curtain) and looms nearer and more menacing until it completely dominates the scene. It is the greatest tragic device known because its ever-increasing magnitude and power accompany the rising climactic action and reinforce it dramatically.

See how effective premonition of evil is in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.[9] The setting is Herod's "golden staircase" at night, and a banquet is going on inside the palace. The opening line, spoken by the young Syrian, reads:

"How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night."

To which the page of Herodias replies, "Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things."

Here at the very outset is a foreboding of tragedy. Again and again in this piece Wilde uses the moon to symbolize the catastrophe that is coming; it has a different meaning for each character. To the young Syrian, who is in love with Salomé, it is "like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver." To the superstitious, fear-crazed Herod, it is "like a mad woman looking for lovers." To his practical, world-hardened wife, "The moon is like the moon, that is all." This dramatic symbolism gives us not only fuller characterization but a sense of imminent calamity. Across the moon's radiance falls the shadow of the wings of death; one can almost hear the beating of those wings.

There is evil prescience, too, when Salomé, in the blaze

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[9] It is interesting to compare this play with the few bare lines in which the original story is couched, Mark VI, 1–17. It shows all that a dramatist must do even when the plot of his play is given him.

of her suddenly discovered womanhood, reveals her passion for John. Three times she declares herself and three times is repulsed:

"Speak not to me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God."

Then Salomé makes her boast, the boast which becomes her doom: "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan." This is fulfilled when, holding the severed head in her arms, she kisses its dead lips.

Herod is standing alone on the terrace, the few remaining rays from the cloud-shrouded moon faltering over him. He turns, unable to bear the situation longer:

"Kill that woman!"

"And the soldiers crush beneath their shields Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea."

II — The Study of Tragedy.

Often people say to me, "Why do you bother with the Greek and other 'dead' plays when you have such a wealth of current drama at your elbow?" My reply is that no proper understanding of modern art is possible until we know something of the long development through which it has grown and which inextricably belongs to it. Consider the superficial vision a visitor gets of a city like New York: exotic lines of skyscrapers seen from the Woolworth tower, a glimpse of the Stock Exchange and Grant's Tomb — the rest but noisy subways, taxis, and busses, all leading to "Broadway." Even Broadway is pictured as a few blocks of Saint Vitus electric signs and theatrical offerings called "shows."

If you want the real city, start at the *beginning* of Broad-

way (which incidentally is the longest street in the city), down near where Edgar Street (the shortest) lies tucked away in a pocket of the Battery. Imagine what has happened since Peter Stuyvesant first stumped about those pavements on his wooden leg. How many people, watching the incessant building and rebuilding of the city, realize that every innovation partakes of the spirit of its predecessors and is colored and deepened by that spirit?

Recently I saw two hundred old buildings razed in the vicinity of lower Sixth Avenue. One moonlight night I came down Minetta Lane where twenty-four hours earlier had stood a house set back from the street, and where entrance was effected by a narrow stairway between two other houses. Up that stairway, it is reputed, had been dragged the "white slaves" of a notorious scandal thirty years back. The house had long ceased to harbor such gruesome traffic, but the shadow of its history still hung over it for those who *knew*. By some strange trick of Fate the little stairway was not yet demolished. It rose from the surrounding wreckage black and defiant against the moon, a last reminder of an ended drama. Had I not known that bit of New York history, what I saw would have been but a scrap of stone and twisted iron — fodder for the coming junkman; but what I did see was a panorama of human suffering and inhuman cruelty made beautiful by a moonlight which had outlived it.

We must recognize that we cannot go to the most modern play without finding roots which strike deep through to the foundation of all drama.

Isadora Duncan recounts[10] an interview she once had

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[10] *My Life*, p. 31.

with Augustin Daly, an early "uplifter" of the stage. She spoke of the theatre having its origin in the dance, of the dancer being the first actor; she prophesied that until the dancer as the Greek knew him returned to the theatre, it would not have full expression. Daly laughed at her; yet now one has only to note the many evidences of Greek choral elements in our drama to see that Miss Duncan's hope is partly realized. There is even a tendency to employ masks. If we know *how* the Greeks used their masks and *why,* we can see whether our needs are the same; and in case they are not, whether new needs have arisen. But if we have no classical background, we can only argue the matter sophistically.

Particularly in the matter of *tragedy* should we begin with the Greeks. They developed the genre in its purest and highest form, and while variations have since been introduced, attic tragedy remains the basis of all tragedy.

Greek period.

There are seven extant plays of Aeschylus, an equal number of Sophocles, and eighteen of Euripides. The works of these three dramatists form the bulk of our representative Greek tragedy. It is not necessary to read all the plays nor half of them. Take two from each writer and read them intelligently and sympathetically.

In the first place, disabuse your mind of preconceived popular notions about the Greeks. They were not a race of rigid automatons who stalked in badly draped white cheesecloth and spouted with flat voices endless, unintelligible harangues. They were active, charming, graceful folk who did things as well as talked about them, and when they talked they said something. No such people

would endure long-winded, devitalized stage performances. If they could see our typical school production of some such play as *Iphigeneia in Aulide* — whether a halting "original" done by prize students from "Dead Languages 26" or an even more deadly translation — they would never recognize their own drama.

See if you cannot read into the Greek plays their original presentations. Let your imagination reconstruct the pictorial and musical qualities. And by all means, get good translations. The best are by Gilbert Murray. He is not only a scholar, but for a translator something more important. He is a creative artist. He has the power of projecting himself into the spirit of Greek life and art and of recreating it for our own world. He handles the English language poetically; and even if he isn't always the accepted text of a Classics Department, he is the best for our purposes.

If you do not know ancient Greece, get some book like Haigh's *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks*. Read here and there as the spirit moves you and don't "cram." It is of little importance whether you remember the meaning of such terms as "dithyramb." Rather interest yourself in what happened to the God Dionyseus, in how the people dramatized such events in their worship of him. Pretty soon you will see the Greek drama growing out of that worship as naturally and spontaneously as a football yell evolves from the enthusiasm of college students. Observe that in those days not only were *physical* conditions of the theatre different, but ideas and philosophies, even morals. For example, vengeance, which to us is a sin, was to the Greek an obligation. If someone wronged his family, it was his duty to avenge the wrong. The whole group of

plays based on the house of Pelops is one unbroken train of vengeance for wrongdoing. Ideas of democracy and social caste were different in those days; do not seek to impose the standards of your own time and locale upon a civilization that flourished two thousand years ago on the other side of the world. Look instead for the great human values which are the same always and through which the human race may always be interpreted.

"Agamemnon."[11]

One of the most stirring of Greek tragedies is the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. It belongs to his late period when he had imbibed some of the principles of his followers; at the same time, it is thoroughly typical of him. You will find it more difficult to read than the plays of Sophocles or Euripides, but it contains more of the Greek spirit.

The play begins with the watchman on the walls. He describes the situation swiftly. Agamemnon is expected home from the Trojan victory. But not all is well within that home. The watchman gives meagre information, as the theme was well known to a Greek audience. Unlike our own drama, the Greek dealt with few stories, and the dramatist confined himself to matters of interpretation. In *Agamemnon* the watchman's few words adequately reminded his audience of the situation. Every Greek knew that Clytemnestra was resentful against her husband, that Agamemnon who had sacrificed their daughter, Iphigeneia, for propitious winds to bear the Greek ships to Troy.

The Chorus enters. Their purpose is to recount the situation and give the author's particular attitude toward

[11] *A Book of Dramas.*

it. Likewise, (a point often neglected in books on Greek drama) they enhance the dramatic emotion. Even though old men, the chorus of *Agamemnon* express a beauty of movement and sound hardly comprehensible in mere reading. The actors who played the rôles had splendidly trained singing and speaking voices, and many of their lines were chaunted to especially composed music. Some of their music has come down to us, and moderns like Stravinsky have incorporated it in their own work.[12] Accompanying the chaunt was an ordered, rhythmic dance of the kind Miss Duncan and her school have revived for us after tireless study of figure postures on ancient vases. Singing, declamation, and rhythmic dancing, therefore, gave life to passages which seem to us in the reading long and monotonous. Costumes were beautifully designed and executed. It takes an artist to drape a tunic gracefully; but when he has, and the colors are harmoniously arranged and blended, the pictorial effect is exquisite. There was a constant shifting and reharmonizing of color designs, dance rhythms, and vocal themes during the enactment of a Greek play; so that the effect was more like opera-ballet than anything else. The main theme of the chorus in *Agamemnon* is:

Sorrow, sing sorrow: but good prevail, prevail!

Not only is the idea expressed typically Greek — "To justify the ways of God to man" — but the line provides a constantly rising *dramatic* motif.

Clytemnestra, appearing in the doorway, forms a picture of foreboding ill. She attempts to vindicate herself. The chorus shows disapproval.

[12] The early portions of *L'Oiseau de feu.*

At length Agamemnon arrives, bearing Cassandra, his captive from the house of Priam. Cassandra serves a double purpose. She provides Clytemnestra with an excuse for accusing Agamemnon of being unfaithful, and, as a prophetess, she adds greatly to the *premonition of evil.* Standing silent and ominously veiled while Clytemnestra enacts her ironic reception to Agamemnon, she emphasizes the contrast between these false honors and the real doom which awaits him. At the height of the action, she gives one despairing cry and foretells that doom.

The catastrophe follows quickly. Agamemnon is murdered, and Clytemnestra pronounces her vengeance.

Then comes the *surprise.* Aegisthos, the lover of Clytemnestra, reveals his identity. He is the son of Thyestes, the brother of Agamemnon's father. Agamemnon's father had caused Thyestes to eat unwittingly the flesh of his own children. Aegisthos, therefore, in seeking vengeance for his father, is the real though secret instigator of the tragedy. This last touch was inserted by Aeschylus as his own manner of ending the play.

The vengeance idea is carried on through two other tragedies: *The Libation Powers* (*Choephori*) dealing with the filial vengeance of Electra and her brother Orestes for the murder of Agamemnon; and *The Benign Ones* (*Eumenides*) which portrays the torment of Orestes by the Furies and ends with his forgiveness by Apollo. These three plays form what were known as a *trilogy.*[13] Later, dramatists did not write trilogies but completed a story within the scope of one play.

Second and third choices from Aeschylus are *Prometheus*

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[13] *The Oresteia.*

Bound and *The Suppliants*. The first may be contrasted with Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* for the difference between Greek and Christian points of view. *The Suppliants* shows the large place the chorus held in early Greek plays.

"Oedipus, King of Thebes." [14]

I select this well-known play of Sophocles since it is regarded as the finest example of classic drama.

Classicism implies the qualities of *generality, dignity,* well-ordered *form,* and *restraint*. More than any other dramatist Sophocles has these qualities. His plays lack the directness of Aeschylus and the humaneness and intimate personal quality of Euripides; but they are superior in symmetrical and lofty beauty.

Oedipus deals with incest, a subject which only a great dramatist could handle without making it repulsive. The success of Sophocles not only proves his genius but testifies to the fact that any subject, no matter how terrible, is suitable for dramatic rendering if a sufficiently great artist undertakes it.

Sophoclean irony is a dramatic device used in this play. When Oedipus condemns the unknown murderer of his father he is *unconsciously* condemning himself. The audience, knowing the truth, can appreciate what the character can not. Another kind of irony is *conscious.* We find it in St. John Ervine's *John Ferguson,* when the young girl sums up the tragic history of her family and bitterly remarks that it was all because "my Uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day." These two kinds of irony have been used by tragic writers for hundreds of years and when used correctly are highly effective.

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[14] *A Book of Dramas.*

Oedipus is noteworthy for the good taste or restraint shown in dealing with horrific details. In the climax, when Oedipus, in his anguish at having unwittingly murdered his father and married his mother, gouges out his eyes, the deed is done off stage. His entrance emphasizes the spiritual rather than the physical side. He calls his two young daughters to him and reminds them of the suffering they will have to undergo:

> Children! Where are ye? Hither; come to these
> Arms of your . . . brother, whose wild offices
> Have brought much darkness on the once bright eyes
> Of him who grew your garden; who, nowise
> Seeing nor understanding, digged a ground
> The world shall shudder at. Children, my wound
> Is young too, and I cannot meet your gaze
> Now, as I think me what remaining days
> Of bitter living the world hath for you.
> What dance of damsels shall ye gather to,
> What feast of Thebes, but quick ye reach the years of love,
> Who shall dare wed you, whose heart rise above
> The peril, to take on him all the shame
> That cleaves to my name and my children's name?
> God knows, it is enough! . . .
> My flowers, ye needs must die, waste things, bereft
> And fruitless.

"The Trojan Women." [15]

Euripides is the most modern of the Greek tragedy writers and the easiest to understand. I suggest for reading, in addition to *The Trojan Women,* the *Hippolytus,* the *Electra,* and the *Medea,* though the last is less skillful than the others in its plotting and less pleasing to present day readers.

[15] *A Book of Dramas.*

The Trojan Women was given in 1914–15 in the stadiums of leading American colleges by a cast including Granville-Barker, Lilla McCarthy, Crystal Herne, Edith Wynne Matthison, and Gladys Hanson. It presents Troy after the fall, when Menelaus comes to take Helen. As Helen was interpreted in that production, you could well believe Paris had braved for her the terrors of a "ten years' hate and a king's honor."

Crowned with a coiffeur of glittering curls and jewelled ornaments, and raised on sandals of carved ivory, she stood, proudly apart, her robe of scarlet silk about her like an arrested flame. The picture made one think of the artists and poets who have created beauty in her memory. Behind her the grey walls turned rose as sunset flooded them. The chorus, in slow-moving rhythm, wound patterns over the court below, and intermittently their voices chaunted in harmonious lament. The houses of Priam and Atreus in condemning Helen forgot their immediate quarrel as, Sirene-like, she laid a golden-throated spell on Menelaus. With superhuman cleverness she pleaded her cause. She reminded them of the choice of Paris — how he had decided among the three goddesses of War, Power, and Love that Love was the fairest. Thenceforth Helen had been the unwilling victim of his choice. She had even saved her husband's country; for if Paris had chosen success in war, Hellas must have fallen beneath his sword:

> Ah, husband still, how shall thy hand be bent
> To slay me? Nay, if Right be come at last,
> And harbour for a woman storm-driven:
> A woman borne away by violent men:
> And this one birthright of my beauty, this
> That might have been my glory, lo, it is
> A stamp that God hath burned, of slavery!

Is it any wonder that Menelaus

flung his sword away
And knelt before her there,
The perfect knight before the perfect queen? [16]

Latin tragedy.

The only Latin tragic writer whose works are preserved to us is Seneca. There is no definite proof that his nine pieces were ever produced, as he wrote them while in exile. They formed, however, the standard for later writers both in England and in France. It is a pity that the Greek plays were not copied instead, for they are much finer. Seneca himself took almost all his material from the Greeks, and he did not do very well by them. His plays have a certain rhetorical value, but they are full of long, dry speeches, and they possess little of the dramatic power of their models. Seneca's *Agamemnon,* copied after Aeschylus, is typical. His *Oedipus* is taken from Sophocles, and the remaining plays are from Euripides. Seneca uses in general the original plots, characters, and scene order. Even the Greek chorus is introduced, though there was no place in the Roman theatre for it to function properly. He employs a five-act division, which was imitated by Renaissance writers, along with several other elements. These elements include the "strut," mythological references, and stock characters such as the messenger, the nurse, and the ghost.

Anglo-Saxon tradition.

Often people prefer an Anglo-Saxon play to a Continental one because it is Anglo-Saxon in spirit and not because it is a better play. We like full plots. We grow impa-

[16] Rupert Brooke, *Menelaus and Helen.*

tient of the highly developed but "skimpy" stories in Continental drama, and sometimes we choose a play inferior in technique because more happens in it. I am the last to deny the greatness of Elizabethan drama; but I feel that it is great because of its subject matter rather than its form. It is great because the people who created it lived and found about them a life that was rich, full of color, exciting, tempestuous, a life which discovery, invention, and foreign intercourse were constantly augmenting. It is great *in spite of* poor form; and where occasionally, as in *Macbeth,*[17] it has plenty of subject matter and in addition adheres to good form, it is *very* great.

Today, a play like *Broadway,*[18] with its many incidents and characters, well but superficially written, is more popular than one like *Jealousy.*[19] This latter piece has but two characters; yet the author so develops them and the situation in which they are involved that he holds the interest throughout.

I make these comments to show that while we need not condemn the Anglo-Saxon play for being rich in content, we can add much to our drama enjoyment if we acquire the habit of demanding form as well. I shall, therefore, take up a period which emphasizes definitely classic tradition and through which I may trace that tradition to the present.

French neo-classicism.

The Comédie Française. In the late seventeenth century Louis, "Le Grand Monarque," decided he was not

[17] *Macbeth* has, perhaps, the best dramatic form of any tragedy by Shakespeare. It shows maturity of technique and is much closer to classic models than the earlier tragedies.

[18] A popular New York success, 1925.

[19] An adaptation from the French, produced in New York, 1928.

grand enough. Louis was always making such a decision; but on this particular occasion his attention was turned to the drama. Not content with being a political boss, a social arbiter, a fashion plate, and a moral censor, he wanted to patronize the arts— especially "l'art dramatique." He had already brought to court Racine [20] and Corneille.

Louis, as godfather to the Muse, talked spasmodically about building a home for her in the centre of his golden realm; and that home, realized in 1680, started the *Comédie Française* on its long and brilliant career. It exists today (for anyone who can forego the allurements of the Folies Bergère) just off the Avenue de l'Opera, by the Palais Royale. Its programs are conservative. Occasionally a modern piece creeps in; more often Victor Hugo and the nineteenth century Romanticists are given the boards. For the most part, however, the drama of Louis — the drama of formalized tragedy and comedy — holds sway. Some erstwhile extravagances are dispensed with, such as Greek and Roman characters strutting about in periwigs and gold lace, and leading actors attempting to ape the manners of the "Sun King." But drama which decrees the doing of certain things in certain ways has here its stronghold. And today, when every new playwright invents new methods, an occasional trip to the *Comédie Française* reminds us that art is both stable and flexible, that its basic laws persist as consistently as the laws of nature.

It was through seventeenth century France that the fundamentals of dramatic presentation — particularly of

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[20] Racine gave up dramatic writing for several years to be historiographer to the king, but finally returned to it at the request of Madame de Maintenon.

tragedy — passed from the Greeks to us. The century had begun with imitations of the Latin, but by the advent of Racine the Greek language had come into vogue and Greek drama was being studied. The dramatists of Louis, though they turned classicism into neo-classicism and took the souls out of the originals, adhered conscientiously to the letter of their models.

The unities.

> That unity of action, time, and place,
> Keep the stage full, and all our labors grace.[21]

Probably the most rigid rules imposed on the neo-classicists concerned the three unities. Greek plays, as you have noticed, are in one act, have generally one setting and no time break. This gives the unities of *time* and *place*.[22] In addition, the plays deal (according to Aristotle's mandate) with but one complete *action*, which is the third unity. When the neo-classicists began to imitate the "Ancients" they broke their plays into five acts, after the Roman manner, but they still attempted to preserve the Greek unities. This obviously imposed limitations, and disputes arose as to how much freedom might be allowed. Finally a decision was reached that the entire action of a play should take place within a period of twelve hours (from sun to sun), which should constitute the unity of *time*. It was further decided that if the action all oc-

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[21] Boileau, *The Art of Poetry*, Canto III, "On Tragedy," p. 20.

[22] Aristotle prescribes unity of action and makes some reference to the dramatic advantages of unity of time. There is little, however, in the fragment of his "Poetics" preserved to us, which indicates definitely his opinion on unity of place.

curred within the walls of one town, unity of *place* had been maintained. Here were purely external and arbitrary rulings which had nothing to do with the fundamental art of a play.

As a matter of artistic fact, the only essential unity is that of *action*. Complete disregard of the first two unities might, of course, result in an episodic play; but many plays widely varying in time and space possess complete oneness of action.[23]

"Phaedra."[24]

If ever you are in Paris, see a performance of *Phaedra*.[25] Whether or not you know French, you will hear cadences of rare beauty and see splendid majesty of movement. Twenty years are required for training in the classic tradition; but the result is an artist unlike those produced overnight by Broadway or Hollywood. If you can't see *Phaedra* acted, read it. Professor Irving Babbitt has written a valuable *Introduction* in which he contrasts the natural diction and manners of the Greeks with the artificial ones of the French Court. He says that Racine himself was conscious of such difference, but played the game.[26] You will observe this if you compare his version with its source, the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. In the original Phaedra cries:

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[23] An excellent view of the neo-classical attitudes on this matter may be obtained from Dryden in his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy,* where he discusses Corneille's *Treatise* on the subject.

[24] *A Book of Dramas.*

[25] The French form is, of course, *Phèdre.*

[26] "Unlike Corneille, Racine moved with perfect ease among all the rules that the neo-classic disciplinarians had imposed upon the stage."

Oh, take me to the Mountain! Oh,
Past the great pines and through the wood,
Up where the lean hounds softly go,
A-whine for wild things' blood,
And madly flies the dappled roe.
O God, to shout and speed them there,
An arrow by my chestnut hair
Drawn tight, and one keen glimmering spear —
Ah! if I could!

While in the French we get, apropos of a similar subject:

for some time past
You have been seldom seen with wild delight
Urging the rapid car along the strand,
Or skillful in the art that Neptune taught,
Making the unbroken steed obey the bit.

Phaedra shows a tendency to long speeches which in translation seem dry and stilted but which in French contain a really great beauty.[27] The nurse, Oenone, is a stock figure borrowed from the Latin; she performs the office of *confidante* and also, by her declaration to Thesus, is made an organic part of the plot. The last act is not highly satisfactory because of the sea monster who brings about the death of Hippolytus. There is no objection to the supernatural in classical plays,[28] but here it is not introduced until the very last moment and the minds of the audience have not been prepared to receive it.[29]

Phaedra is an exquisite piece of artificiality and the best transition we have from the classics to our own tragedy.

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[27] The Love Declaration of Hippolytus in Act II.

[28] The *Medea* of Euripides is full of it.

[29] Make a comparison with the handling of a similar situation at the end of *Riders to the Sea*.

The modern period.

There has lately been a tendency toward classical form in tragedy. Such plays as Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* and Bourdet's *La Prisonnière* are in strict classic mould, and even *Journey's End* [30] shows in restraint, artistic good taste, evil premonition, and dramatic beauty, qualities distinctly Greek.

John Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan* is largely in Greek style, although the murder occurs on stage; and St. John Ervine's *John Ferguson* follows an even more classic model. I should prefer that you read the latter play. It has been revived several times in the United States, and it possesses a lasting effectiveness.

"Riders to the sea." [31]

This is one of the best modern examples of classicism.[32] John Synge left his native Ireland to study formal drama in Paris. He spent many years delving into Racine and Corneille, and (what was more important) through them he came to know the Greeks. He tried to imitate these models. The result was a lifeless and soulless copy without human interest but with a mastery of technique obtainable in no other way. At the end of this apprenticeship William Butler Yeats, campaigning for the "Irish Renaissance," [33] stumbled over him in his garret. "Gird your loins, young man!" he said. "Get back home and

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[30] An English war play produced in New York in 1929.

[31] *A Book of Dramas.*

[32] Ludwig Lewisohn (in *The Modern Drama* p. 274), refers to it as "thoroughly naturalistic," but this is a somewhat exceptional classification.

[33] An attempt to restore Ireland to a sense of "national consciousness" through her cultural heritage.

write something real." Synge did. He went to the Aran Isles and for two years lived the life of their people. Now he was on fertile ground. His work was vital, as his imitations of a dead and foreign drama could not be. Yet it had technical perfection, the thing which Yeats himself, Lady Gregory, and even the present Sean O'Casey, have lacked. And Synge's drama has been lasting and universal largely because of it.

You will find in *Riders to the Sea* rhythmic choral chaunting represented by the moaning women; you will find fatalism in the ever-impending disaster; you will find Sophoclean irony in the episode of the coffin; you will find unity of tonal coloring in the sombre atmosphere of Irish coast life; and most of all you will find life made emotionally significant in every line from "She's lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping — if she's able," on through to old Maurya's purely Greek acceptance of the will of God:

> No man at all can be living forever,
> and we must be satisfied.

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Topics for Reports and Special Study.

1. The place of the chorus in Greek tragedy.
2. The survival of the chorus in modern tragedy.
3. The three unities in neo-classicism.
4. A comparison of the four Electra stories in Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Hofmannstahl.
5. A comparison of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus with that of Seneca.
6. A comparison of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides with the *Phaedra* of Racine.
7. The "Anglo-Saxon tradition" as shown in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy.*

8. A comparison of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with Dryden's *All for Love.*
9. Dryden's opinions of French neo-classicism.
10. The application of modern psychology to Benavente's *The Passion Flower.*
11. Greek elements in *Riders to the Sea.*
12. Greek elements in *La Prisonnière.*
13. The application of modern psychology to Heiberg's *The Tragedy of Love.*
14. The "beauty" in either *The Lower Depths* or *The Living Corpse.*
15. Greek elements in either Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan* or Ervine's *John Ferguson.*
16. The quality of "inevitability" in Green's *In Abraham's Bosom.*
17. The manner of "treatment" in Ibsen's *Ghosts.*
18. A comparison of four modern tragedies.
19. A comparison of the "disaster" in *Riders to the Sea* and *Justice.*
20. The spiritual quality in *Beyond Human Power.*

Chapter III

COMEDY

I — The Nature of Comedy.

Humor.

Why do we laugh? If that question could be answered in one sentence, there would be no need for a large section of this book. I have heard teachers say that laughter is caused by a readjustment of inferiority complexes. We see ourselves in stage heroes and heroines, and see our neighbors in the ridiculous characters. This is true, but it is only part of that element called humor. I cannot give you a definition of humor.[1] Aristotle tells us that its purpose is similar to the purpose of tragedy, except that comedy deals with ignoble characters in ignoble situations. Cicero defines comedy as a copy of life, a mirror of custom, a reflection of truth; and critics several centuries after founded their judgments upon this precept. Dante is sometimes attributed with giving comedy the broader definition still used by the French, which includes every piece of literature not ending in death for the principal characters. Dante says[2] that comedy begins with an un-

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[1] "Comedy has been particularly unpropitious to definers; for though perhaps they might properly have contented themselves with declaring it to be *such a dramatick representation of human life, as may excite mirth,* they have embarrassed their definition with the means by which the comick writers have attained their end, without considering that the various methods of exhilirating their audience, not being limited by nature, cannot be comprised in precept."— Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler.* Number 125, Tuesday, May 28, 1751.

[2] "Epistola XI," *A Translation of Dante's Eleven Letters,* by Charles S. Latham, p. 196.

fortunate situation terminating fortunately. He therefore calls his own chief work [*Divine*] [3] *Comedy,* since it begins horrifically in hell and ends happily in *Paradiso.* It is doubtful whether Dante was particularly interested in drama definitions, and scholars have tended to make more of them than they should.

The best definition of humor I know is in Congreve's *Letter on Comedy:* [4] ". . . a singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything, peculiar and natural to one man only, by which his speech and actions are distinguished from those of other men." This is perfectly true, though it is more a definition of what we today call "characterization."

Limitations of humorous appeal.

Geographical. Let me tell you a funny story. An American lady was taken to call at an English home. The conversation turned to peculiar designs in jewelry. The hostess addressed her American guest: "Have you no odd jewelry in America?" . . . "Why yes," answered the guest. "I have a friend who has a bug in diamonds." . . . The hostess raised her lorgnon in horror. "A bug in diamonds! How extraordinary!"

Are you laughing? Not unless you know more about English colloquialisms than most Americans. The word "bug" in England has only one connotation. It means that particular insect which infests the boudoirs of indifferent housekeepers and is not usually mentioned in

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[3] The word "Divina" was not used by Dante, but was supplied later by his friends.

[4] Sent to John Dennis, July, 1695.

drawing-rooms. Consequently, a "bug" in diamonds would be the height of what the English consider our ostentatious vulgarity. In the same way there are words with meanings peculiar to the United States. You can call to mind a dozen which prove that humor is limited by geography.

Racial temperament. Humor also depends on racial temperament. English revues when brought to America have to be changed.[5] We have a lighter touch here, more akin to the Irish and the French.[6] And we are not given to satire so much as the English, for we are a young people, a little over-sensitive to ridicule. Let me give you a song from Nigel Playfair's *Riverside Nights*.[7] The setting was a bare, cold room, where a broken bed, one straight chair, and a rickety dresser constituted the furniture. On the walls were bits of rotogravure depicting popular movie actors. The singer was a stupid maid of all work, downtrodden and homely. Here is her soul's cry:

> For *I* don't 'ave no adventures in the street,
> Men don't register emotion when we meet;
> Jack don't register Love's Sweet Bliss,
> And I says "Evenin'," and Jack says "Evenin',"
> And we both stand there at the corner of the square,
> Me like a statue, and 'im like a bear;
> 'E don't make faces like the movie men.
> 'E just holds tight till the clock strikes ten;
> Then I says "Friday?" and Jack says "Right."
> Jack just whispers, and I can hardly speak,
> And that's the most exciting thing that happens in the week.

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[5] Noel Coward's *This Year of Grace* and *Charlot's Revue* are examples.
[6] I am not thinking of our cheap humor relegated to third-rate theatres.
[7] Produced in London, June, 1926.

I saw the opening of that revue, and later when I spoke to Sir Nigel about it and learned that he was most anxious to bring it to America, I could not resist reminding him of the difference between the two publics. To us that picture is as pathetic as the portrait of George Moore's "Emma." [8] It is too full of pain to be funny. Yet the English laugh at it. And when we consider the Scandinavians or Slavs, we find this tendency toward sharp satire increased. Ibsen is more biting than we usually interpret him, and George Bernard Shaw got something of his acidity from the Norwegian.

Freak humor. Even within the boundaries of one country and race, the effect of humor is sometimes doubtful. A recent article [9] mentions "9000 jokes taken from the avowed humor of the past six years" and presented to a committee of judges. No two judges agreed as to which were the "funniest." One joke no one would laugh at. I take the liberty of quoting it:

"Irate old gentleman (who has just fallen into a wash-tub): 'Who's knocking?'

"Street car conductor: 'Nobody's knocking. This is the seventh of April!' "

Whatever humor there *may* be in that story is derived from the lack of all logical connection among the various parts.

Psychological. Here is another story:

Once upon a time a gentleman thought he'd like to have a horse. So he went to another gentleman who had a horse for sale and stated his desire. The other gentleman pre-

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[8] A similar "slavey" in *Confessions of a Young man.*

[9] *The Nature of Humor,* John C. Almack, *Century Magazine,* September, 1928.

sented him to a very charming horse which he promptly purchased. Now, as he was going away the other gentleman said, "I forgot to tell you. The horse has a slight peculiarity. He likes to sit on beans.". . . "Sit on beans," said the purchaser. "What a strange thing for a horse to do.". . . "Well, you'd better not drive him near any bean vines, or he'll sit on them; and that won't be good for the beans.". . . The new owner thanked him for the advice and started off. Eventually he and the horse became intimate friends. They went everywhere together. And the gentleman was always careful not to drive near any bean vines. But one afternoon, when they visited a stream to drink, the horse suddenly sat down in the water and refused to move. The gentleman looked about, but could see no beans. So he tried to convince the horse of his mistake. The horse, however, was impervious, and remained seated: in fact, it was only with the greatest difficulty that he was finally induced to go home. Naturally, this upset the gentleman, and he went forthwith to the other gentleman and told his tale. At its conclusion, the other gentleman exclaimed, "There now! That's just like me. I'm so absent-minded. I forgot to tell you that the horse has another peculiarity. He likes to sit on fish."

Are you laughing this time? It depends on "sense mindedness." Scientists say that some people are primarily visual in their receptivities and some auditory; so if you are *visual,* and visual to a high degree, you will derive amusement from this story. Have you ever had a back view of a horse sitting down? From his all too pointed head to his all too broadened hind quarters, the lines are absurdly oblique, like a pyramid. Add to this figure the incongruous stream and the fish (that last word psy-

chologists tell us is on the "funny" list), and you have a picture which is genuinely amusing.

Intellectual limitations. Just as many stories are limited by *psychological* demands on the reader, so others are limited by *intellectual* ones. We cannot expect the story which needs a background of culture or technical knowledge to be appreciated by the unitiated.

Social. And then there is the socially limited story. Sometimes I think this limitation is the greatest of all. In New York City there are a hundred different social classes, and I know of few villages that have not a half a dozen. People from one class will not laugh at the jokes of another. They find these jokes "too common," or "too silly," or "too snobbish," or "too vague."

Many years ago when Oscar Wilde was visiting a frontier town, he paused one day to look at a cheap chromo. A cowboy shot off a gun behind him, causing Wilde to jump.

"That's the way we treat strangers out here, Mr. Wilde," said the cowboy.

Immediately all the onlookers yelled with laughter and slapped their thighs. That laughter came from being "set up" because one of their kind had got the better of a stranger.

Wilde's reply was, "Which only proves that one shouldn't look at cheap chromos." Though truly witty, it failed to be appreciated; it was said to the wrong people.

Masculine or feminine elements in isolation. True humor can exist only where women have intellectual and social equality with men. Take the dinner party where Mr. Jones sits next to Mrs. Jones and the eating is done in silence. It is of short duration, and the ladies soon retire to the parlor where they discuss cooking receipts, gossip,

children, and so forth. The gentlemen gravitate to another room and their talk is of crops, baseball, automobiles, or local politics. Sooner or later someone in each group tells a "funny story." The men express themselves in rather coarse and vulgar humor, a variety often dependent upon the use of obscene or profane words. The women (so I am told) recount flat and unvital stories.

But take a dinner where Mr. Jones sits beside Mrs. Smith and they have to be entertaining because they are not married to each other. Notice how much longer the dinner lasts. And notice how much gayer the conversation is. In these days when ladies do not retire to the drawing-room and gentlemen do not smoke alone, the humor is apt to continue right through the evening. Please understand that I am not making here the comparison between educated and uneducated people. I have attended "stag" affairs where cultured and sophisticated men made merry, and I have found such gatherings inferior in wit and humor to others where those same men were gathered with women. Each sex apparently is needed to complement the other.

Undiscriminating laughter. A comment of George Meredith [10] concerning "agelasts," "misogelasts," and "hypergelasts" might be apropos. He tells us that there are people who cannot laugh, people who hate laughter, and people who laugh too much. The people who cannot laugh may be those in whose lives misery and misfortune have played such part that they have lost the power of laughing. Or they may be people like the orthodox Puritans whose religious or other training precludes laughter.

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[10] *Essay on Comedy.* Delivered at the London Institute, 1877.

On the other hand, there is the incessant laugher. In this class (leaving aside those who laugh to cover nervousness) is the nit-wit or stupid person and the extremist. The man who slaps you on the back and shrieks over the poorest joke has no real sense of humor — nor has the roystering bacchanalian.

Stephen Leacock [11] gives us several kinds of comedy which should not be. He condemns in turn the practical joke, the anecdote attached to a prominent person, the cruel joke, the vapid joke, and most of all the joker who tells jokes without an especial gift of telling them. I wish he had also condemned the "pun," with which he sometimes mars his own splendid humor.

The practical joke. Much of our poorer comedy is based on this. I remember once, as a child, pulling a chair out from under my mother. She fell to the floor, then waited until I had finished laughing. "Help me up!" she directed, without anger. I did so. She explained that what I had done was a trick so old that it occurred in the Roman plays two thousand years ago — that it figured in the antique pantomime of French strolling players — that Shakespeare used it for the antics of Puck — and that I myself had got it from the circus clown and the comic newspaper. There was no originality in it, she said, and apart from a professional setting it was humorless. Even on the stage its only value lay in the way it was done. A comedian of long training, and a gifted comedian at that, was needed to make the thing funny. As an amateur I had no business to try it. "Any time you can play a joke on me," said my mother, "a joke that is original, witty, and

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11 "Humor As I See It," from *Further Foolishness*.

imaginative, I'll be the first to laugh, and I'll be proud of you for having played it." This was one of the best lessons she ever taught me.

Intellect versus emotion.

Unlike tragedy, humor does not have its basis in the emotions, but in the intellect or intelligence. The development of a man's mind is a man-made thing; his beliefs and prejudices are formed according to the group in which he lives; and since these groups differ the world over and from age to age, it is very difficult for him without conscious effort to bridge the gap from one to another. On the other hand, the emotions — I mean the big, fundamental ones — are universal. They are not many, and human nature reacts to them pretty much the same everywhere. A murder or a rape in Czecho-Slovakia calls up about the same sentiment as in Iowa, and a good tragedy in one language can be adapted into a good tragedy in another. Comedy, appealing to an ever-varying "intellect," confronts an ever-varying "prejudice" and often is of purely local interest. Translations are occasionally successful, but as a rule the original "flavor" is lost.

Cosmopolitanism.

One may ask what common ground can be discovered for an appreciation of comedy. The reply is, the same common ground required for an appreciation of any art form — cosmopolitanism. The man who has experienced much, has mingled with many kinds of people, usually attains a mature tolerance. His own standards of right and wrong and his personal conduct may remain the same; but (granting he is of human stuff) there grows up in him

a mellow acceptance of life in all its phases, a knowledge that every sincere manifestation is but a variant of the cosmic urge of which he himself is part. And nothing is quicker to facilitate his harmony with the world than a keenly and kindly developed sense of humor. What Leacock calls "that strange incongruity between man's aspirations and his achievements" is a thing which causes us to smile and at the same time make room for our fellow man in the general scheme of life.

When I use the word "cosmopolitanism" I mean two things. I mean first *knowledge*. This is acquired by travel or reading, without one of which nobody can expect to get beyond provincialism. I once met a lady who had spent all her life in a certain groove of New England society. I called to take her niece to a dance restaurant that had just been established in Boston. "Tell me," she said, "what do you do there?" . . . "We order something to eat and dance to the orchestra," I replied. . . . "And is it public? May any one come in off the street and see you?". . . I assured her that any one might. . . . She thought for a while, and I saw that her imagination was having a difficult time of it. "It's all very strange," she remarked finally. "Of course I've heard of such things; but to have them brought home to one — " and she looked wistfully at her niece — "No! I don't understand! It's just like being on shore and watching far off a ship at sea. It doesn't seem real." . . . Now I should hate to have that lady for a comedy audience. She knew nothing beyond her own narrow environment.

Yet travel and reading will not *alone* suffice. I have known people who have been round the world, whose minds are veritable catalogues of information; yet who are

no more *cosmopolitan* than if they had stayed at home and read the local newspaper. Nothing they encounter really touches them, and they interpret it all in the light of an inherent prejudice. They are people who are either afraid of life or who have no real capacity for it. Even without the usual forms of "broadening" you may achieve cosmopolitanism by making yourself actively and sympathetically alive to everything you come in contact with. Strange to say, this process more than any other develops a sense of humor. Once when I was playing "tank" towns I found myself late at night in the station of a railway junction. Among the travelers was a tiny girl belonging to a poor family. She clutched in her hand a bedraggled bunch of flowers and went from one person to another asking him to "'mell!" Each obligingly smelled and gave the child an amused and tolerant smile. Finally she approached a *grande dame* sitting stiffly in the corner. "'mell!" she invited, thrusting forth her flowers. The lady drew herself up indignantly. "'mell!" repeated the little one. . . . The lady grew still more aloof. The other travelers began to grin. The child, offended, looked the lady deteminedly in the eye. Then she commanded in no compromising tones, "'mell, damn you, 'mell!" . . . The lady "'melled." She might better have done it in the first place; but she couldn't! — she had no sense of either humor or humanity.

Wit.

I have already said that the appeal of comedy is *intellectual,* though true humor also makes an appeal to the feelings. The element, however, which does *not* concern

the feelings is *wit:* this is today the main distinction between humor and wit.

Let us look briefly at the history of the words. Humor, or "humour," in the time of Jonson meant a disposition that came from the physical constitution and temperament of a character, and therefore involved his feelings. It did not necessarily mean something that was *funny* (even now we speak of a person being in "bad humor"). Wit, on the other hand, concerned the intelligence. This word, also, did not imply "funny," and does not today when we speak of a person "having his wits about him" or being "dull-witted." Wit is the *sense* of comedy, and without it humor is apt to become sentimentality.[12] Wit in drama is often considered merely as clever epigrammatic dialogue: it should be treated equally with humor as an organic part of comedy.

High comedy.

Technically, "high comedy" refers to the limited, artificial, and closely specialized comedy which sprang up in Latin and English countries for the delectation of an intellectual and social aristocracy. Molière developed it out of many years of trial. It shows at its best in *The Misanthrope* (a piece far different from his *Tartuffe and The Would-be Gentlemen*). High comedy in England was developed during the Restoration period. It mirrors the brilliant, hard, unsentimental court group who were flattered at seeing themselves portrayed even when their own faults and foibles were ridiculed. Many writers have

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12 "Sentimental comedy" will be taken up in the chapter on "Sentimentalism."

maintained that there is no better way to discourage an undesirable thing than to laugh it out of existence; and if high comedy has a mission besides the giving of artistic pleasure, that is it.[13]

High comedy exists today in such pieces as William Somerset Maugham's *Our Betters,* where the class of foolish American women who marry impoverished foreigners is satirized. High comedy is not found in the cheap jokes of vaudeville or in most musical "shows." And it is absent from the average motion picture "comic." Things which are funny happen in motion pictures, but they can seldom be classed as high comedy, and they are usually funny because a good comedian has made them so. Charles Chaplin can get comedy even into the hurling of custard and dough,[14] but it does not produce "thoughtful laughter."

Thoughtful laughter.[15] This is the most valuable phrase that has been given us for the understanding of high comedy. The audience that sit alert through the enactment of a fine play, that catch the subtleties of dialogue and action, that give vent to little ripples of appreciative laughter, are the ideal comedy audience. But they are the most limited audience in the world. Until very recently they have been almost non-existent in our country. This is because a civilization must be established a long

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[13] "To expose vices to the ridicule of all the world is a severe blow to them. Reprehensions are easily suffered, but not so ridicule. People do not mind being wicked; but they object to being made ridiculous." Preface to *Tartuffe,* Van Laun translation, Vol. IV, p. 127.

[14] Chaplin once wrote and directed, but did not act in, a picture called *A Woman of Paris.* Though melodramatic in plot, it contained some of the finest high comedy ever produced.

[15] Meredith.

while before it has a leisure class. I do not mean by "leisure class" the uneducated sons and daughters of nouveaux riches who spend their time in the pursuit of fleshpots. Nor do I mean a worn out aristocracy who with changing economic conditions have become decadently parasitic. I mean people who have had money long enough to know what to do with it, who need not work so hard in acquiring it that they have no time for life itself. I mean people who truly appreciate fine things, and who have time, strength, energy, thought, power, and developed judgment to encourage them. I mean "dilettanti" in the best sense of the word; for the dilettanti, from the beginning of civilization have sponsored culture and encouraged it. High comedy, more than any other form of art, requires this particular sponsorship. It requires people who can pause and be amused at little things, who have leisure afterwards to think back over those things and be amused anew — who can, perhaps, learn from them something fundamental about human relationships. Underneath the absurdities of any good high comedy lies truth, and those who are willing and able to ferret it out are what I mean by "leisure class."

Creative imagination.

"Imagination" is a word too rarely applied to comedy, and people do not realize that comedy writing needs a *creator*. Take the most valuable comic device in the world — the mixture of universes. This is selecting an image from one category of human experience and applying to it an image from a totally different category. For instance, Mr. St. John Ervine in one of his articles in the *New York World* says: "Dirt is real; dirt is earnest; and things are

not what they seem unless they smell." Here he is mixing an old truism with words of an entirely foreign category, and the result is comic. A juxtaposition of two artistically incompatible images produces a comic effect.

But don't forget that the juxtaposition must be *artistic.* Unless we have *creative imagination* as strong as we should need for writing tragedy, we shall never be able to think of just the right images. The comic artist must do exactly what every other artist must do, he must "give birth" to something which did not exist before, and it must not be a patchwork quilt made up of stolen bits cleverly sewed together. The ingredients may be taken from an already existing universe, but they must pass through a form of conception and pre-natal growth. To make this clear, I will give you an example from a very commonplace phase of life. Suppose I make a fruit salad. I cut up apples, and bananas, and cherries, and grapes, and I put them on lettuce leaves, and pour French dressing over them. I call the result "fruit salad," but what really is it? It is apples, bananas, cherries, grapes, lettuce, and French dressing — which is *combination* not *creation.* But suppose I make a cake. I mix sugar, butter, eggs, flour, baking powder, salt, and milk. I put the mixture into the oven. What comes out of the oven? Is it sugar, butter, eggs, flour, baking powder, salt, and milk? No! *Cake* comes out of the oven. Of course, scientists will tell you that they can reduce cake to its original elements. So can the dust reduce us all to the dust from which we came; but we have been for a time *created* entities. Now just as the cake differs from the fruit salad, so does an inspired work of art differ from the output of hack writers. You will find all this in a much more scholarly fashion said by Pro-

fessor John Livingston Lowes in his book entitled *The Road to Xanadu*.[16]

The cruel in comedy.

I have already spoken of comedy that is "cruel." The infliction of pain, no matter at whose expense, is not funny to most of us. Ruth Draper used to present a sketch called *The German Governess*. The governess, with a frightful cold in the head, is left to watch her trying charges. She is so ill that she should be in bed; but she must face her responsibility. Miss Draper's sniffles and expostulations were intended to be funny, but they were so realistic that one could almost see the tears in the poor woman's eyes. This realization of pain quite prevented any enjoyment of the comedy.

In a preceding chapter I mentioned the hair line between tragedy and comedy; I need do no more now than remind you of it. The best comedy approaches serious life and sounds the wellsprings of the soul. It is deeply imbedded in the sources of human conduct and desire, and only its outward manifestation makes it funny.

II — The Study of Comedy.

Classical period.

The Greeks wrote little genuine comedy. They wrote satires, sometimes coarse and often cruel, as the works of Aristophanes bear witness. Later the comedies of Men-

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[16] To emphasize the importance creative imagination has in comedy, I have chosen to place these comments here instead of giving them a more conspicuous and extended treatment elsewhere.

ander gave a certain pastoral lyricism similar to those of Shakespeare.[17]

Roman comedy is even more opposed to our own. Its coarseness and vulgarity must be softened for present day appreciation.[18] If you want a good picture of Roman comedy, read Louis Couperus's *The Comedians*.[19] This is really a fiction book, but it is not, so far as I have ascertained, archeologically inaccurate. I should mention that it is not entirely "proper"; if you are dubious, take it to your censor and have him extract all but the chapter describing a Roman theatre and the enactment of plays.

Plautus and Terence. These two Latin writers influenced the comedy of the Renaissance,[20] though this comedy had its source at home. Plautus is the more verile of the two and Terence the more delicate. Both men, like Seneca, imitated the Greek, and most of their comedies were adapted from Menander. Plautus, however, gave little, vulgar, Roman touches and turned his plays into what were really farces. If you wish to investigate these men, you might read *The Captives* by Plautus and *The Phormio* by Terence. *The Phormio* is taken from Apollodorus (a Greek writer) instead of from Menander; but it is the most interesting of Terence's plays. Both pieces

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[17] See *As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night.*

[18] Ben Jonson said in reference to classic comedy that "what either in the words or sense of an author, or in the language or actions of men, is awry or depraved does strangely stir mean affections, and provoke for the most part to laughter. And therefore it was clear that all insolent and obscene speeches, jests upon the best men, injuries to particular persons, perverse and sinister sayings . . . in the old comedy did move to laughter, especially where it did imitate any dishonesty; and scurrility came forth in the place of wit . . ." *Timber,* p. 82.

[19] Doubleday Page, New York, 1926.

[20] The plots, particularly of Plautus, were copied by Shakespeare and others.

use the *parasite,* who dupes others into giving him the essentials of life free of charge. This figure may be found in Molière as well as in many English writers. I shall not attempt here to show the various influences of Plautus and Terence, since comedy, more than tragedy, is dependent upon race. I can probably trace the comic spirit for you better in our own language.

Early English comedy.

Just as the Greek drama grew out of Greek religion, so English drama grew out of the Christian religion. You can get its general history from any good period work, and what I will emphasize here will be specifically the rise of comedy.

The trope.[21] There are two fundamental urges in every human being: the *will to have* and the *will to be.* Where the first urge is stronger, the individual turns to "acquiring" things, material or otherwise. Where the second is stronger, imagination comes into play, and the individual is not satisfied until he has projected himself into different entities. Let us picture three English choir boys of the tenth century. They have been told that they are to take part in a trope. The trope in question is the Easter Dramatic Office of Saint John. It is in Latin and is to be chaunted at the high altar. Remember that the Bible in those days was not written in English, that the church service was in Latin, and that the people did not understand Latin. Therefore, to convey some meaning of the Bible stories, *pantomime* had to be used. So we have a little play of the Resurrection in which three choir boys

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[21] A trope is an interpolation in the mass of the Roman Catholic Church.

with their robes arranged to suggest women approach the high altar as the three Marys approaching the tomb of Christ. They discover that the stone has been rolled away. Amazed and joyous, they burst into an exultant "Gloria." Now two of our boys are the *will to have* type. They are in the trope because the priest has told them to be, and because it will please their parents, and perhaps because they have been promised some reward if they do their rôles well. Their ambition consists in growing up and *having* each a fine house, a fine wife, and an enviable position in the community. They chaunt their parts automatically, and neither forgets for a moment that he is an English choir boy doing a job because he has been told to. The third boy is the *will to be* type. He may have no better voice than the others; but suddenly as he stands at the altar, it becomes for him Christ's sepulchre: the breath of a miracle blows upon his eyes, and he is no longer a little English choir boy, but Mary, the Mother of God. Something in his face and voice sends a magnetic wave over the congregation. "Christ is Risen!" The miracle becomes immediate and real. The people react. And their reaction completes the birth of drama in England.

The miracle play. The moment drama is born, no matter how serious, surely and inevitably, its comic side will appear. There are several famous characters in early English comedy, chief among them being Mrs. Noah and Herod. In all probability, these figures were not comic at all in their initial conceptions; but they grew to be. Theories vary as to how that growth occurred. Undoubtedly, the naïve tendency of all early peoples to burlesque is partly responsible.[22]

[22] Mrs. Noah became the symbol of the obstinate English housewife, and Noah that of the henpecked husband.

But *accident* (of a certain type) is even more instrumental. We will assume an incident in a late development of the trope, the miracle play. By this period the high altar is an unsuitable place for a performance, for the story and cast of characters have grown too elaborate, and English is used instead of Latin. So the little play is given in the nave of the church. (Soon it will be moved to the porch; then to the yard outside; and finally out of the Church's jurisdiction.) The story is the slaughter of the innocents. Herod, the fearful, terrible tyrant is supposed to thunder his awful edict and fill the congregation with dramatic thrills. But Herod in this case has been unwisely chosen. He is not the great big man with the great big voice and the awe-inspiring presence the part calls for. The local grocer or tanner has brought pressure to bear, and *his* son is chosen, alas, a spindly-legged, squeaky-voiced, chinless youth. When he struts about in absurdly long robes and lopsided crown and bleats his fatal commands, the result is plainly ludicrous. The younger members of the congregation titter. Their elders try to suppress them, but even a few of these find the preservation of religious respect difficult.

We will assume that the unfortunate young actor has the *will to be* tendency. It is not his fault that nature has failed to make him heroic. He wants *to be* Herod. And perhaps he thought he was, till the people laughed. Now they are making fun of him. His eyes fill with tears, for there is no shame like the shame of artistic attempt ridiculed. Right here comes this boy's test as an actor. Once given the gift to see himself objectively, to realize that any appeal to the serious side of his audience is impossible, he may make a momentous decision. Some of the greatest comedians the world has known have sprung from just

such moments. Since he cannot *be* a serious Herod, he will *be* a funny one. For to the real actor (if I may paraphrase Hamlet) "To be in *any* way is better than not to be." He deliberately makes capital of his shortcomings. He invites the laugh. And the laugh returned is *with*, not *at* him.

Drama, like water, will find its level. It may start as the handmaid of religion; but it ends as itself. The people want it — have a fundamental need for it — and as it grows more human it approaches the complete fulfillment of that need. The Bible stories grow increasingly English. The shepherds at the manger of Christ proffer English mittens and talk in the homely language of their own peasantry. What did even the monks know of "Orientalism" and "East Mediterranean countries"? As drama tends to reflect the life of a people, the funny, the ridiculous, and the pathetically amusing are emphasized.

I suggest that you read the *Second Shepherds' Play* (*Secunda Pastorum*). Observe the representation of English country life and manners, something not to be found in the most human history.

The morality play. For a time plays called "moralities" ran side by side with the miracles and continued after them. The characters in these plays are moral abstractions personified, and save for a few stock figures (such as the "Vice" that later contributed to the Elizabethan clown), they are serious in presentation. The moralities, as a whole, have very little good drama in them.[23]

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[23] An exception is *Everyman*, a tragedy originating in the Dutch. This play was revived some years ago by Sir Henry Irving, and in 1928 the German version was done in this country by Moissi and the Reinhardt players.

The interlude. The term is difficult to define. Sometimes the comic portions that form definite sections of the miracle plays are given this name. The interlude, as a play by itself, comes in during the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1547). It is occasionally didactic; but more often it is meant for sheer entertainment. These little plays did more than the moralities to preserve the spirit of comedy for the Elizabethans. Good examples are *A Mery Play Betwene Johan Johan the Husbande, Tyb his Wife, and Syr Johan the Preest* and *The Playe Called the Foure PP,* both by John Heywood.

Elizabethan comedy. While not ignorant of the mass of excellent material in this era, I take the liberty of passing over it briefly. There are on the subject many fine works designed to give more exhaustive treatment than I could possibly give here. Also, I have noticed that a study of Elizabethan comedy often resolves itself into a study of the times; [24] and this, though perfectly legitimate, is aside from my purpose. My main reason for passing on to a later period, however, is that I particularly wish to emphasize *high comedy;* and high comedy, except of a pastoral nature, is meagre even in Shakespeare.[25]

Romantic comedy. Romantic comedy entered English drama in the sixteenth century. Such old plays as *Common Conditions* possess it, and Lyly and Greene, two of Shakespeare's predecessors, developed its possibilities; Shakespeare, of course, perfected them, particularly in his

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[24] Such a play as Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) presents a splendid picture of London common life and character.

[25] I am inclined to agree with those who call plays like *Much Ado About Nothing* "romantic comedy." Shakespeare's nearest approach to genuine high comedy is *All's Well that Ends Well,* and this is one of his least popular plays.

last plays. During the seventeenth century, romance is expressed more in tragedies. You might look over Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher* (1606); also, the sophisticated and graceful dialogue of Fletcher in *Philaster*.

The comedy of humours. I am not going to set you at reading Jonson. He is too far removed from our own day, and too ponderous.[26] I am merely going to give you his *humour* idea. This idea invested people with marked characteristics, according to their physical and temperamental make-up. One trait dominated, largely to the exclusion of others. Consequently, Jonson's characters were inclined to be one-sided.[27] I can best describe them as two-dimensional. They are like moving-picture figures with height and breadth, but no depth. You feel that if you could get to the side of them, they would look flat. However, just because they did over-emphasize one feature, they brought "character," as such, into prominence: and out of this came the *comedy of manners*. It had not gained much headway up to the closing of the theatres in 1642;[28] but it did create a comic tradition which the Restoration could look back upon.

Commedia dell'Arte.

The comedy of the Renaissance in Italy and France had its sources in the buffoonery of strolling players and in the "mystère."[29] In Italy there grew up, probably out of

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[26] The Theatre Guild production (1928) of the German version of Jonson's *Volpone* was more suited to us than the original.

[27] *The Alchemist* (1610), in the case of its three leading characters, is an exception.

[28] All the theatres in England were officially closed from 1642 until 1660.

[29] The French word for the religious plays. The term "miracle" originally referred to incidents derived from the stories of the saints.

these same sources, what is known as the Commedia dell' Arte. This originated about 1350 and eventually exerted a tremendous influence. Reduced to simple elements, it reveals itself as *impromptu comedy,* often including local jokes. It is theoretically the comedy of the people, but at its height it concerned itself with sophisticated and cultural matters. It became a self-appointed critical school, lampooning current political, social, and artistic ideas and events. Although beginning with impromptu speeches, the dialogue became more and more formalized, and even the costumes tended toward a set conception. One has difficulty in determining how much ultimately remained of the naïve and simple qualities.

Today one can hardly pick up a drama magazine without finding some reference to the Commedia dell'Arte, but modern ideas on it seem to be both varied and hazy. Attempts to imitate it have been largely unsuccessful. Puccini, for instance, wanting to bring himself up to date in his declining years, inserted into *Turandot* three Commedia dell'Arte figures, "Ping," "Pang," and "Pong." He wrote for them grotesque music, and strove to weave them organically into the opera by giving them a philosophical connotation. The result was not happy, though a few "intellectuals" tried to pretend it was. The Provincetown Playhouse in New York took this same story of *Turandot.* It had been adapted from the old Chinese, through the Tartar race, into Russian, given Moscow Art Theatre touches, and translated into English. It was put on by none too professional players, with local allusions to the Bronx and other New York suburbs, and was a bit too much. In fact, it wasn't "commedia" and it wasn't "arte." Impromptu comedy can be artistically successful

only when done by professional comedians of considerable experience and creative talent. A man named Jack Wilson used to appear in vaudeville. He always "closed" the bill, and his act consisted in burlesqueing the preceding acts. He had been at it for years and had a natural flair for it; even so, if you saw him at the *end* of the week when he had studied the other acts and improved his satire of them, you found him much cleverer than at the beginning. All Commedia dell'Arte, as it approaches perfection, ceases to be impromptu and becomes either regulation farce or strict comedy, with (if you insist) local atmosphere.

French classic comedy.

As with tragedy, comedy was formally developed in France during the seventeenth century. Partaking in the same way of Latin influences, it shaped itself along classic lines. The great figure of Molière, however, was too human to produce a soulless copy of the ancients. His plays, all the way from little farces to perfected high comedies, bear an imprint that is distinctly French. He is at once national and universal, as any good comedy writer must be. No finer examples could be given the student than *The Ridiculous Young Ladies, The Miser,* and *The Misanthrope.* If you can read them in French, so very much the better.

"The Misanthrope." [30]

Some people acclaim this as the greatest comedy ever written. It was born of many things: Molière's actual experience as a poet, a manager, a producer, an actor — and

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[30] *A Book of Dramas.*

most of all, his experience in life. The subtle, delicate soul of Molière, tortured yet smiling at its own torture, lies within the play. Molière had a pretty wife, who perhaps meant no ill, but who could not resist driving him frantic with her flirtations. He loved her devotedly and put up with her vagaries and extravagances. When he wrote *The Misanthrope* he wrote his own *cri du coeur* and then laughed. Waldo Frank says of Molière: "His hand, shaken with tragedy, grew firm to produce comedy. And in the will behind that firmness lies the deep secret of his laughter." [31] Mr. Frank feels that *The Misanthrope* is practically plotless, that Act I does not lead into Act II, and is really a conversational one-act play. I scarcely think this is so. Act I is very short, and in a small space it developes the principal character and his situation, including the introduction of his love difficulties. It terminates with a dramatic note in the proposed duel, which, of course, creates suspense to carry us over into Act II. Célimène, who is introduced in the second act, is a difficult character to paint attractively. A lesser artist would have made her unbearable, for she is so fickle and needlessly cruel. It is possible, however, that Molière got from his own love experience the power to give Célimène a required charm. It should be noticed that Molière keeps a balance of sympathy; even Alceste is not without flaws. This point is one which must always be remembered in connection with high comedy: the sentiment should never swing so far toward a particular character that truth is lost. The act ends with a touch of pathetic irony when Alceste, who should have deserted his loved one as he threatened to do,

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[31] Introduction to *Plays by Molière,* Modern Library Edition.

finds her fascination too great and announces that he is coming back.

The original production of *The Misanthrope* was a failure, and we cannot wonder at this, considering its sharp arraignment of the court group that comprised its audience. Act III contains a great deal of such invective and is probably the least pleasing of the five. It deals with the disagreeable scheming of Arsinoè.

The end of the play is unexpected and masterly. The lovers are not united, and if we contemplate the matter, we realize that they should not be. This is an interesting contrast to the sentimental endings of most Anglo-Saxon comedies. Éliante, the most pleasing character in the play, would have been made the heroine by an English or American playwright. Compare her situation with a similar one in a comedy by Philip Barry,[32] where the plot is so manipulated that the hero's affections are shifted from the wrong girl to the right one.

A hasty reading of *The Misanthrope* does not convey its full beauty. It is so delicately balanced, and the elements of wit and humor are so harmoniously blended that its very smoothness keeps it from striking us forcibly. I know of few high comedies that improve more markedly with continued study.

Restoration comedy.

In the late seventeenth century *low comedy,* with Thomas Shadwell at its head, became the comedy of the people. *High comedy* was patronized by the aristocrats and is the form usually implied when "Restoration" is mentioned. Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*

[32] "Holiday," produced in New York with Hope Williams, 1928.

(c. 1624) and Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) are early high comedies; when Charles II came to the throne in 1660 the genre was definitely established. It reflected the customs and manners of the court group, and if it is questionable morally, the blame lies with its patrons.

People often misunderstand the Restoration. Suppose you take the pendulum of a clock, and raising it as high as you can on one side, let go. What will be the result? The pendulum will swing high on the other side. And so long as you interfere, it will continue to react in extremes. This holds true of any unnatural prohibition.[33] The aristocracy, coming back into power, indulged itself like a starved man placed before a banquet. In the theatre it demanded to see itself portrayed; and while serious drama and low comedy resumed something of their former expression, high comedy soared without restraint into excesses typical of the people it aped. I am the last to defend Restoration morals; but its *manners* are the great heritage it has passed down to us.

In connection with this point, I should like to interpolate a comment on two kinds of modern critics who are unintentionally injuring our drama. One is the critic with homely and even vulgar tastes, the man of the masses, who achieves his reputation through cleverness and a knowledge of drama *facts*. He insists that modern drama be only an expression of the laboring or middle class, and every time he witnesses a play in which the characters are well dressed, use good English, and behave like ladies and

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[33] The theatres were closed for political not moral reasons. All public places are dangerous in times of trouble, and seventeenth century actors had royal patrons whom they could not resist defending on the public stage against the leaders of the Commonwealth.

gentlemen, he brands it as "artificial" or "theatrically old-fashioned." His democratic appeal is, of course, strong; but even in a democracy, there *are* people who do not eat with their knives or mix their syntaxes. These people supply high comedy material and often the best of tragedy.

The other sort of critic is the ultra-sophisticated, hyper-aesthetic person whose way of living has taken him so far from the primitive that he either finds or pretends to find a fascination in it. He feels that it gives him a vicarious strength. I shall never forget an early performance of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* at the Provincetown Playhouse. I saw limousines roll down from Park Avenue and the "high brow" studios; their occupants, coiffeured, groomed, and stamped with every artificiality that money and opportunity can procure, poured into the little barn-like theatre. Seated on hard benches which they would never have endured elsewhere, they watched a grimy stoker and his mates give vent to anthropologic ideas in anthropological manners. They "thrilled." They didn't consider that Gorky, Strindberg, and Hauptmann had done the same thing better and that O'Neill himself had surpassed it in earlier work. They kept saying to one another, "How splendidly elemental!"— "How vir-ile!" And then they returned to their limousines with, I suspect, a feeling of superiority because of their own civilized state. Professional critics from this group are constantly writing articles and books on *American Drama,* in which they advocate a drama of mediocre people expressing mediocre ideas and tickling the vanity of mediocre audiences.

Of these two species of critics, I prefer the former; he is at least honest and has a good reason for his prejudices.

William Congreve. Like other Restoration writers, Congreve imitated French comedy; though you must not expect to find in him the same delicacy you found in Molière. Even with the best English dramatists the keen edge is taken from comedy when it crosses the Channel.[34] I am inclined to believe that we Americans have greater aptitude for handling French comedy than the English. We are quicker and lighter in speech and manner, and as we have fewer traditions we can adapt ourselves more readily to those of other people.

William Congreve is superior to his native contemporaries, and the artistic ideals expressed in his critical works are high. But he did not always practice what he preached. Probably *The Way of the World* is his cleverest play, even though it is faulty in plotting. Don't take the characters as models for conduct; [35] take them as brilliant and audacious portrayals of a brilliant and audacious era. Observe the flow of wit, extending even to the servants, and the elegance of phrase.

No discussion of *The Way of the World* is complete without a comment on the heroine's first entrance. Mirabell cries:

> Here she comes i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.

Strangely enough, this bears a close resemblance to the dignified Milton's "Samson Agonistes":

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[34] It is interesting to examine William Wycherly's *Plain Dealer*, an adaptation from *The Misanthrope*. This is one of the coarsest and ugliest plays of the Restoration, and an excellent example of what happens to French comedy in transition.

[35] Congreve never meant that you should, any more than Shakespeare meant you should emulate Iago.

But who is this? what thing of sea or land —
Female of sex it seems —
That, so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing,
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles
Of Javan or Gadire,
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courted by all the winds that hold them play;

One almost suspects Congreve of irreverence.

An excellent specimen of high comedy dialogue is to be found in the scene with Millamant immediately following:

Mrs.[36] Millamant. Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?

Mincing. Oh, mem, your la-ship stayed to peruse a pecquet of letters.

Mrs. Millamant. Oh, aye, letters — I had letters — I am persecuted with letters — I hate letters. — Nobody knows how to write letters — and yet one has 'em, one does not know why. They serve to pin up one's hair.

Witwoud. Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters? I find I must keep copies.

Mrs. Millamant. Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud; I never pin up my hair with prose. I fancy one's hair would not curl if it were pinned up with prose. I think I tried once, Mincing.

Mincing. Oh, mem, I shall never forget it.

Mrs. Millamant. Aye, poor Mincing tift and tift all the morning.

Mincing. Till I had the cremp in my fingers, I'll vow, mem; and all to no purpose. But when your la-ship pins it up with

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[36] The title "Mrs." does not necessarily imply a married woman.

poetry, it sits so pleasant the next day as anything, and is so pure and so crisps.

WITWOUD. Indeed, so "crisps"?

MINCING. You're such a critic, Mr. Witwoud.

"Love for Love" [37]

This possesses a better plot than "The Way of the World," and I suspect that the student unfamiliar with wit combat can enjoy it more. It has typical high comedy qualities, though once or twice (as in the scene of the confused marriages) there are unmistakable farcical touches. *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World* were revived in New York the same year (1926), and *Love for Love* enjoyed a greater popularity.[38]

Compared with modern comedies, the older ones are baldly obvious in methods of exposition. Characters are described immediately before their entrances, and things are said in inartistic asides. This must be laid to custom and not to the individual playwright.

One of the cleverest scenes in *Love for Love* occurs at the beginning of Act IV where Angelica arrives at Valentine's lodgings and talks with his friend, Scandal. Each is attempting to "pump" the other and to get control of the situation. It will be noticed that Angelica is in some respects similar to Célimène, except that she is inherently "moral" and that Congreve allows her a sentimental ending.

Valentine's father is one of the Restoration's "awful old men." Where Molière would have made the French proto-

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[37] *A Book of Dramas.*

[38] The original production of *The Way of the World* in 1700 failed, but this was because external situations had created a change in public attitude.

type bearable, Congreve has failed to give a miraculous saving touch.

Whether or not the student naturally takes to Restoration Comedy, he should at least acquaint himself with it, for, more than the plays of any other period, it will help him to understand the principles of high comedy.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century English comedy.

In my chapter on "Sentimentalism" I shall take up the attack of Jeremy Collier in 1697 and the long period of sentimental comedy that followed it. Suffice here to say that Collier in *The Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* precipitated a conflict which lasted ten years. This conflict, added to the change in social conditions, produced an era of sentimentality that has not even today reached its culmination. Only once (1770–1780) was the era broken into, when Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan made their memorable contributions.[39]

Oscar Wilde.

Whatever our opinion of Oscar Wilde as a poet, novelist, or essayist, and whatever our contempt for his melodramatic plots, we must acknowledge him as the first person in a hundred years to give us high comedy. His gift to the English drama is "words, words, words": but such words! The color, brilliancy, smoothness, and swiftness of them come like running water after the sentimental morass. If there were no other excuse for high comedy, this proof of its beauty of language would be sufficient. Wilde's epigrams are not meant to be taken literally. He

[39] These two dramatists will also be considered in the chapter on "Sentimentalism."

purposely stands a truth on its head; but it is a truth to begin with.[40]

A Woman of No Importance.

Read Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance.* Though not so popular as *Lady Windermere's Fan,* it is a finer example of high comedy.[41] People have said that Wilde's characters are all alike, that the speeches of one could be used for another. Yet observe in this scene the subtle differentiation. Lady Hunstanton is the conservative who tries to be brilliant; Lady Caroline is the conservative who doesn't; Lady Stutfield is the conservative who will agree with anybody because she is mentally lazy; Mrs. Allonby is the radical:

LADY HUNSTANTON [to Mrs. Allonby]. Well, dear, I hope you like the park. It is said to be well timbered.

MRS. ALLONBY. The trees are wonderful, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY STUTFIELD. Quite, quite wonderful.

MRS. ALLONBY. But somehow, I feel sure that if I lived in the country for six months, I should become so unsophisticated that no one would take the slightest notice of me.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I assure you, dear, that the country has not that effect at all. Why, it was from Melthrope, which is only two miles from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale. I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Belton died three days afterwards of joy, or gout. I forget which. We had a large party staying here at the time, so we were all very much interested in the whole affair.

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[40] American critics are violent in their denunciation of epigrams; S. N. Behrman and Philip Barry are the only two native playwrights permitted to use them.

[41] In Wilde's plays always distinguish between plot on one hand, and dialogue and characterization on the other. I refer here to dialogue and characterization.

MRS. ALLONBY. I think to elope is cowardly. It's running away from danger. And danger has become so rare in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE. As far as I can make out, the young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire.

MRS. ALLONBY. The one advantage of playing with fire, Lady Caroline, is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; I see that. It is very helpful.

LADY HUNSTANTON. I don't know how the world would get on with such a theory as that, dear Mrs. Allonby.

LADY STUTFIELD. Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

MRS. ALLONBY. Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them.

LADY STUTFIELD. Yes; that is quite, quite true. I had not thought of that.

When you consider that no sweeping distinction in dialogue is possible, since these are all people of the same social caste with the same background and training, a remarkable amount of individuality is expressed. In fact, the scene comes as near to Congreve's definition of "humor" as any I know of.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW.

I have already said that Shaw got much of his satire from Ibsen; but Wilde was his own countryman doing in his own language the thing Shaw wanted to do. Shaw, of course, went further; his is a broader if not deeper intellect, and his character is stronger. Nevertheless, he owes a huge debt to Oscar Wilde.[42]

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[42] Wilde was four years younger than Shaw, but as a dramatist he was important earlier.

He is never the best of dramatists. Technically, his early work, such as *Candida* or *You Never Can Tell,* is more actable than his later.[43] Read *Candida.* It is both charming and subtle, and it reveals a hint of the more serious Shaw we have been getting recently.

Professor George Pierce Baker has said that in time to come Shaw will be read not for the way in which people lived in his day but for what they thought. He presents us with a comedy of *ideas.* He is the arch-talker; and he is great because he interests our minds. It might be said that just as Wilde recovered *language* for our theatre, Shaw brought back *thought.* Shaw was a great stimulus to Jones and Pinero, who are in turn connecting links between the old drama and the new.[44]

Contemporary American comedy.

American comedy has taken several directions. Leaving aside those plays strictly in the category of farce, and the hybrids miscalling themselves "farce-comedy" or "comedy-drama," we have in addition a limited amount of high comedy and a peculiar form that in Europe would be termed "bourgeois."

Bourgeois comedy. This is an outgrowth of our peculiar social conditions. Curiously enough, some critics refer to it as "American comedy" and assume that no other kind exists here or has a right to exist. An example is George Kelly's *The Show-Off,* which is a realistic, comic, unsentimental play of middle class life. It is sharp,

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[43] I suppose there are no finer serious passages in dramatic literature than some portions of *Back to Methuselah;* yet the play as a whole is impossible.

[44] Jones and Pinero will be considered in the chapter on "Realism."

satirical, poignant, and human; and it is above all *American.*

High comedy. Until recently this type has been almost non-existent. Importations from Europe have been received by the intelligentsia because they were importations, but American playwrights have been discouraged in the genre. A few years ago Philip Moeller gave us two high comedies; one a mere gesture entitled *Helena's Husband;* the other *Madame Sand* in which Mrs. Fiske starred. This latter play, though weak in plot, contains sparkling and iridescent qualities. About the same time Louis Anspacher wrote *The Unchastened Woman,* in which graceful and clever dialogue was somewhat marred by a sentimental story. Philip Barry has made several attempts at high comedy, but his greatest success, *Paris Bound,* is a Shavian play of ideas.

Only one American writer seems to adhere closely to the form. S. N. Behrman has contributed *Serena Blandish* [45] (1929), a delicate, audacious, highly tinted piece of extravagance completely in the high comedy mood. Some of the critics complained that it is "whimsical," others that it is not whimsical enough, but personally I neither find nor feel the need of whimsicality. The objection was probably to its extravagant and artificial atmosphere, which is exactly the atmosphere required.

"The Second Man." [46]

Behrman's other high comedy, *The Second Man,* has been a tremendous success. It was presented in New York by the Theatre Guild in 1927 and had a long run

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[45] *Serena Blandish,* or *The Difficulty of Getting Married,* by "A Lady of Quality."

[46] *A Book of Dramas.*

both in that city and in Chicago. I think it may be regarded as (up to the present) *the* American high comedy. In the first place, it is completely native. Its characters, though sophisticated and cosmopolitan, are American people as much as the characters of *The Show-Off*. Its scene is America. And the things happening are things which can and do happen in this country. At the same time, the entire technique is strictly in accordance with conventional European traditions of high comedy. The piece is a combination of wit and humanity such as I spoke of in connection with *The Misanthrope*. Its people are both laughable and lovable, and though only four of them carry the play, they do not once drag its thin-spun plot into monotony. At times delicate clouds of sentiment drift about them, but always the sure sun of good sense and good taste brings them out again. As with *The Misanthrope,* balance and harmony are invariably kept.

Do not take the character of Storey literally. His speeches have behind them the fundamentals of truth, but they are turned upside down and decked in gay, exotic garments. His complete honesty is his one cardinal virtue. As he says himself, "I'm an adventurer — intellectually and morally — an *arriviste* with one virtue — honesty." Like many such people, when put to the test he is revealed a thoroughbred. His bark is more ravishing than his bite.

Monica is an unmoral child. No better description could be given her than the one Storey himself offers: "A Tennysonian ingenue with a Freudian patter." She creates impetuously an embarrassing situation for herself and everyone else because she has no conception of self-control or social obligation. She is like a large number of American girls, over-indulged, over-confident, and under-

developed; withal she is not malicious, and once her emotions and intelligence get into some sort of harmony her finer qualities come to the fore.

Austin is the typical absent-minded scientist. But he is more than a stage figure, and his reactions are an individual combination of ideal and petty.

Kendall, though having less to do than the other characters, has in some ways the most appeal. One feels sorry for her in loving Storey; yet one envies her the prospect of his delightful companionship. She shows a peculiarly French quality in her philosophical acceptance of life. We can appreciate her accedence at the end of the play when we hear Storey telephoning her. This speech is a master-stroke. It begins on a note of complete frustration. Kendall is convinced that he is the father of Monica's wholly mythical, unborn child, and apparently nothing he can say will change the impression. Then comes his unexpected little twist — that compels her sense of humor and does what no amount of earnest persuasion could: ". . . Kendall, I promise you — I absolutely promise you — that if their baby — if their baby bears the *slightest* resemblance to me — thank God, Kendall, you're laughing. . ." From thence it is but a step to the enthusiastic and enticing itinerary of their proposed honeymoon through Europe. The curtain descends on a note, light and rippling, as all high comedy curtains should.

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Topics for Reports and Special Study.

1. The satire of Aristophanes.
2. The germs of "high comedy" in Terence.
3. "High comedy" elements in Shakespeare.
4. Jonson's theory of *humour* as applied to his own characters.
5. The germs of Restoration Comedy in Massinger and Shirley.
6. "High comedy" elements in Molière.

7. A comparison of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* with Wycherly's *The Plain Dealer*.
8. Goldoni's influence upon European comedy.
9. Congreve's application of his theories on comedy to his own work.
10. The satire of Sheridan.
11. The "reality" of Pirandello.
12. The satire of Schnitzler.
13. The dialogue of Molnar.
14. The dialogue of Wilde.
15. Shaw the talker and Shaw the dramatist.
16. Maugham and the spirit of "high comedy."
17. The satire of Synge.
18. George Kelly and "American humor."
19. "High comedy" elements in Philip Moeller.
20. Behrman's contribution to "high comedy" compared with Philip Barry's.

Chapter IV

FARCE

I — The Nature of Farce.

Farce is one of the most popular — and at the same time least understood — forms of the drama. True farce occupies a very high place, but poor farce (the kind more often seen) is hardly worth consideration. Each year a score of farces appear, some of which drop by the roadside overnight and a few of which persist into "hits." The "highbrows" regard these pieces with contempt; yet every now and then a farce springs up which deserves artistic recognition. It is the exception I am here concerned with.

Definition of a farce.

A farce is an exaggerated humorous play which does not represent life but which reminds us of life.[1]

Exaggerated.

In connection with this word two other words need to be considered. One is *extravaganza,* the other is *burlesque.* Extravaganza, of course, has a special meaning as applied to the old-fashioned, elaborate scenic piece [2] combined with English pantomime. But extravaganza has another

[1] The difference between comedy and good farce is more in degree than in kind. The two words, "exaggerated" and "reminds," if properly interpreted, describe about the only truly distinctive qualities of *farce.*

[2] Hanlon's "Superba," the last prominent example of this in America, used to be a yearly institution and was found especially attractive to children.

meaning, a meaning implying the word extravagant or exaggerated. One occasionally hears a certain kind of broadly comic play called "extravaganza." In such a sense it has the same connotation as the word "farce"; it is *exaggerated.*

"Burlesque" also has more than one meaning. For years we Americans have identified it with a cheap musical entertainment interspersed with "olios." Such entertainment used to contain obscenities and vulgarities regarded as too coarse for the ears of women; now these pieces have been tamed until they are nothing but third-rate revues. Moving pictures and other rivals have broken their popularity, and the day may come when they will be obsolete. True *burlesque,* however, means something entirely different. It contains satire, and, like extravaganza, implies the quality of exaggeration. We may therefore say that farce is based upon exaggeration as the word is used in connection with extravaganza and burlesque.[3]

Of course, the exaggeration must be something more than mere absurdity; farce has its roots as deeply planted in the truths of life as are the roots of high comedy. Only the *expression* is extreme — and even this must not be overdone. Molière gives us a last act to *The Would-be Gentleman* so exaggerated that the imaginations of the audience are powerless to connect it with known things.

I once received a humiliating lesson in unrestrained farce. As a student in composition I submitted a farcical story entitled *Low Down East.* It was aimed at *Way Down East* in which Lillian Gish was being starred. By juggling the original material I managed to obtain a mod-

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[3] "Burlesque" contains *satire;* extravaganza (in itself) does not.

erately funny effect. Dean Briggs (that perfect teacher of composition and youth) read the piece, and the class began to laugh. Since they were a blasé lot, I was flattered. As their amusement increased, my ego began to inflate. "If they behave so in this part of my story," I thought, "what will they do at the grand climax?" I all but laughed myself. The grand climax approached, and to my horror I heard the laughter diminishing. The more the "fun" was piled on, the less the auditors were amused. At the close barely a smile was left among them. . . . Now had I taken the scene exactly as the "movies" played it, I should have had farce enough; for in order to jazz up Lottie Blair Parker's old melodrama, $50,000 had been spent on an "ice scene" in which the fair Lillian (or her less expensive "double") was sent, prone on a cake of ice, whirling through a raging torrent to *the falls*. The hero, jumping from cake to cake, Eliza fashion, reached her just as she was about to go over. Clasping her in his manly arms, he turned, and beat the torrent at its own game by leaping back again upstream to safety. My own version of this incident I spare you. Suffice to say that it wasn't funny; and it wasn't funny because it was *too* exaggerated.

Reminds.

Farce is not, like comedy and tragedy, a representation of life. It is too exaggerated and too improbable [4] for that. Yet it should, through all its ridiculousness, *remind* us of life. And in so far as it reminds us, it is good. If we form a proper conception of the terms exaggerate and

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[4] I do not include the term "improbable" in my definition, as this is not a desired quality of farce: it is merely an unavoidable one.

reminds, and apply to it our conceptions of humor and a play, we shall have a working definition of farce.

Other interpretations of farce.

Some people believe that, granted an impossible premise, everything which follows in a farce must be a logical outgrowth of preceding events and characterizations, the same as in comedy and tragedy. I doubt the correctness of this. Recently farces have become more and more logical, until often the real essence of comedy has crept into them. But this is done at the expense of comic sweep. George M. Cohan's *The Baby Cyclone* (1927) belongs in such a class. Its individual scenes are near to comedy; but the piece as a whole would have been funnier had it been more unleashed.

The tendency to label plays "farce-comedy" is a poor one. Farce exacts from us one attitude; comedy another. When a play attempts to exact both, we are confused and annoyed. We feel as if the author is tricking us, for we cannot respond in two different ways at once. Of course, comedies are sometimes given farcical discolorings by producers or actors, and the playwright must bear the blame. But whoever is responsible, the two genres will mix no more than evening clothes and chewing gum.

In summing up the nature of farce, I need only say that a dramatist who has the distinguished gift of writing in this medium deserves a high place among the world's creative artists. He may find many claimants to his title but few rivals.[5]

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[5] ". . . an excellent farce cannot be written by a person of ordinary ability. It demands an original touch of humor; its characters are like the grotesques of Callot, in which the outstanding characteristics of the

II — The Study of Farce.

English farce.

Primitive comedy seems like farce today. Comic portions of the miracle plays, interludes, and short pieces for school-boys which flourished in the sixteenth century all give this impression. Among the school plays I recommend *Gammer Gurton's Needle.*[6] You can find it in Manly's *Specimens of Pre-Shakespearian Drama* and in many other anthologies.[7] This play, more than its famous companion, *Ralph Roister Doister,* has a genuine English atmosphere and gives a pleasing picture of humble rural life of the day.

French farce.

If you are in Paris at any time, catch a classic farce at the Comédie Française. Even Racine turned his hand to them, and the little farces of Molière are often delightful. I don't advise reading many of these, for they suffer in translation; besides, they need all the consummate artistry of fine actors to give them their original flavor. Few people can turn buffoonery into beauty as the Comédie Française troupe do. If you read a long Molière farce, take *Tartuffe.* I know that it is often classified as "comedy"; but like *She Stoops to Conquer,* it should be played in the rollicking spirit of farce. This makes it more amusing, and the ex-

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human being are preserved. It is not within the ability of everyone to twist his viewpoint thus. If we think there are more men capable of creating *Pourceaugnac* than the *Misanthrope,* we are mistaken." "Oeuvres Complétes de Diderot," Tome IV, *Théâtre,* "Du Drame Burlesque," VI, p. 455.

[6] Probably written by William Stevenson (1552–1553).

[7] It has of late years been revived by Stuart Walker in his "Portmanteau Theatre."

tremes to which the characters go (particularly Madame Pernell and Tartuffe himself) do not seem out of place.

"The Farce of the Worthy Master Pierre Patelin." [8]

Of all early farces, *Pierre Patelin* is perhaps the most satisfying.[9] It was written in Mediaeval French about the middle of the fifteenth century, and the author's name has not come down to us. It has become so popular of recent years that many translations have been made, and the piece is done constantly by Little Theatre groups, schools, and colleges. It tells the story of a miserly tailor, a rogue lawyer and his wife, and a rogue shepherd. The rogues indulge in typical "gulling." *Pierre Patelin* is not written haphazardly, but is a well-ordered play. The two main episodes of the cloth fraud and the sheep stealing are unified at the end. The piece is a bit obvious, and some of the points are "worked" for more than is in them; but if you do not take too sophisticated an attitude, you will be exceedingly amused. The leading character is more rounded than one usually finds in old farces; the opening scene reveals his roguery, but the additional picture of domestic neediness makes you tolerate if not excuse him. This point is strengthened later when the man he gulls is himself shown a cheat. The introduction of Tibald Lambkin heightens the plot and adds "poetic justice":

PATELIN [*silent for a time, then grinning pathetically*]. Alas! 'Tis only paying me in my own coin. . . . Nevertheless 'twas a fine idea. . . .

That last touch is worthy of high comedy.

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[8] *A Book of Dramas.*

[9] Produced in New York by the Washington Square Players, 1916.

After reading *Pierre Patelin* you might turn to a similar piece by a modern writer. This is Anatole France's *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife.* It deals with the same period and is written in the same lively mood. A few years ago the Granville-Barker Players produced it in America with marked artistic success.

Modern American farces.

The first years of the twentieth century gave rise to several good farces; in fact, this period might be called the *age of farce.* George M. Cohan was at the time a young man playing with his father, mother, and sister in little vaudeville sketches of his own writing. They were full of what was termed "Yankee pep," though actually they relied for comic effect on the swift playing and running in and out of doors typical of French farces. One of these sketches, called *The Governor's Son,* was turned into a long play. It was not so good in revised form, since the butter had been spread thin and the one good situation reserved for the "big scene." It created considerable sensation, however, and gave Cohan his start.

"The Importance of being Earnest." [10]

Here is probably the greatest farce in our language. It is a perfect combination of *burlesque* and *extravaganza,* and it *reminds* us of life to an extraordinary degree. It rises to heights of absurdity but never once passes beyond our conceptions. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the last act, in which Earnest is heard bumping about in the garret for the black bag that will prove his identity; yet nothing is more definitely within the limits of human

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[10] *A Book of Dramas.*

receptivity.[11] In like manner, the scene in Act I where Jack's talk to Lady Bracknell about marrying Gwendolyn is frankly impossible. Yet in that absurd old dowager we see all the match-making mammas of the world; much that she says no dowager would say, but they are all things that many a dowager would *think*.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* Wilde gives us a prize epigram. Earnest is watching his sweetheart, Gwendolyn, leave the room with her none too attractive mamma. He says to his friend, "You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolyn becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you Algy?" . . . To which his friend replies, "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy." Then he adds, "No man does. That's his." A *bon mot,* if you like, twisted two ways to show how clever the author is. But what a fundamental double truth underneath this foolishness.

Farce in this country need not fear for itself. We have a natural gift and liking for it, and our boards will never long be silent from its merriment. It needs drama lovers who will accord it a legitimate place in the theatre and demand of it the best it is capable of giving.

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[11] It is unfortunate that amateurs choose so often to do this play. In fact, all farce seems easy because it is obvious.

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4. Farce value of the " interlude."
5. Farce elements of *Tartuffe* as distinguished from comedy elements.
6. The modern farce as distinguished from the farce of the nineteenth century.
7. The quality of burlesque in *To the Ladies.*
8. A comparison of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *A Woman of No Importance.*

Chapter V

MELODRAMA

I — The Nature of Melodrama.

Historically, the word comes from *mélo drame,* meaning *drama with music,* which was carried from France over into England during the eighteenth century. I suppose the violin staccato that once emphasized the villain's threats and the "Hearts and Flowers" accompanying the love scene were survivals of that idea. But for us melodrama has long held a different connotation.

It is often erroneously identified with the word *theatrical.* Theatrical, in the sense of "good theatre," is what Victorien Sardou was when he wrote *Cleopatra, Gismonda, The Empress Theodora,* and other flamboyant but effective dramas of two generations ago. And strangely enough, such people as Arthur Hopkins and Gilbert Miller [1] are just as theatrical. But they are not usually *melodramatic.*[2] The two terms should never be confused.

Definition.

A melodrama is an exaggerated serious play in which the parts are not harmonized with one another and the emotional expression exceeds the emotional content.

Use the term *exaggerated* just as you use it in connection with farce; but remember that while farce did not ask you

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[1] Supposed to be in the opposite camp.

[2] They have occasionally produced melodramas.

to accept its exaggeration as an interpretation of life, melodrama does. This gives melodrama a falsity which farce does not possess.

Unharmonized parts. By *parts not harmonized with one another* I mean that one act does not flow logically out of a preceding act, and that the characterization as a whole is inconsistent. Each scene or speech is written for its own effect, regardless of other scenes or speeches. This is not a fault if we do not take melodrama as genuine representation; it gives the dramatist more leeway to pack in thrills, tears, and all the other perquisites of the form. But our tendency of late years has been toward logic and plausibility. We are no longer content to see Pearl White thrown off a New York skyscraper in one scene and down a Paris sewer in the next without being told how she got from New York to Paris. Before the war, Jane Cowl made a definite gesture[3] toward good characterization *within the act.* Since then we have demanded more consistency, so that when a melodrama of the older type goes on we refuse to accept it. As the genre approaches perfection in characterization, plot, and profoundness of thought, it approaches genuine tragedy. In this respect it is unlike farce which no perfection can make anything other than itself.[4]

Emotional expression and content. Suppose that in the classroom I should drop a blackboard eraser on my foot. I swear violently, I go into hysterics, I faint, or I do all three. That is melodramatic. My *expression* is

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[3] *Within the Law* (1913).

[4] I do not, therefore, put melodrama into the category of art; but as an imaginative stimulus for the uncultured, and an occasional entertainment even for the "intelligentsia" it is defensible.

too intense for the situation it expresses. But if what I drop is a thousand dollar Ming Vase belonging to my Dean, and it shatters into irreparable Humpty-Dumptyism, I am more justified in my violence. A really great dramatist can gauge so delicately the exact amount of emotional content in a scene that he can write just up to and not exceeding it. In that way he gets the greatest amount of drama out of his material.

If we are going to get real enjoyment from melodrama, we must not be over-critical in matters of exaggeration, inconsistency, and the balance of emotional expression and content. A good melodrama will *thrill* us if we happen to be among those who respond to this sort of thing. If we do not, we can never be thrilled, and no amount of study will help us. I do not think there is any such thing as learning to appreciate melodrama. We can, however, learn to leave our critical faculties at home and give our naïve susceptibilities an opportunity.

II — The Study of Melodrama.

I do not recommend much reading of melodrama. It usually deals with type characters, so broad and so frequently portrayed that they need no explanation. The stock hero, heroine, and villain change their dress and speech from age to age, but their natures remain the same. The good characters still cling to obvious virtues, and the bad to obvious vices. You know in advance how each will react, and your interest lies in the situation itself and the particular thrill it contains. The old "road" melodrama has given way to the "movie," and the high priced brand has borrowed plumage from its sister forms;

but under the surface it is the same old thing. *Broadway* sports a hero and heroine who are night club "artists"; yet inherently they are identical with characters in *A Father's Curse* or *Death Before Dishonor.* The course of true love does not run smooth with them; the villain pursues, the happy ending takes place, and good triumphs over evil exactly as it did in the melodrama of forty years ago.

The Silver King.

This war horse of Henry Arthur Jones appeared first in London in 1882. Jones was at the beginning of his career, and while he may have been conscious that the play was melodrama [5] it is doubtful if his public were. An early program contains the following lines from Tennyson's *In Memoriam:*

> I held it truth, with him who sings
> On one clear harp of divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.

which implies that the character rehabilitation of *Denver,* the hero, was to be taken profoundly. As a matter of fact, Jones does some good work in this characterization. He seems to be striving, despite the demands of a crowded plot, to make Denver a genuine portrait, and he shows the power he later exhibited in his more pretentious plays. I suggest *The Silver King* because nothing could be more typical of old-style melodrama. It was a tremendous success and was revived year after year.

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[5] He later spoke of the form as "the dull devil of melodrama."

"The Green Goddess." [6]

Here is the new type. The play is known to a vast number of Americans,[7] both because of the excellent portrayal given the leading character by George Arliss and because of its success in motion pictures. *The Green Goddess* and *The Shanghai Gesture* are probably the two best melodramas produced since the war.

It is interesting to note that the author of this piece, William Archer, is the man who introduced Ibsen into England, and who gave us an important treatise on playwriting.[8] I will not trace his "dramatic principles" in the play, but I will endeavor to point out some of its significant features.

The Green Goddess is a clear type of melodrama, written deliberately by a master of technique who weighed each effect carefully. At times this self-consciousness makes itself felt, as when the characters grow over-rational and anticipate one another's thoughts a little too logically. For the most part, however, the piece "thrills." Act I is short, direct, and to the point. The announcement at the climax that the condemned men are the Raja's brothers comes as a surprise and lends sufficient body to the hitherto ominous implications to create a genuine suspense for the second act. Act II develops the irony of the situation. The Raja is made attractive in his villainy, not only because of his grace of manner but because one feels a certain sympathy for him in his humiliation under the powerful English rule. The predicament of the strangers is well

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[6] *A Book of Dramas.*
[7] Produced in New York, 1921.
[8] *Play-making,* 1912.

established and the interest correspondingly heightens. Act III, dealing with the "wireless" situation, is given over to action exclusively. The movement is swift and exciting, and the struggle with the valet and unexpected shooting produce a splendid termination. Act IV makes a marked shift in the atmosphere and brings in added color. The "love scene" is a bit old-fashioned; but it is quickly dispensed with, and the scene which follows is highly emotional. The spectacular arrival of the airplane fleet at the end and the Raja's frustration round out the story with complete effectiveness. No better final touch could be had than the Raja lighting his cigarette. As Arliss did this piece of stage "business" it was superb. He seemed to puff into the air his philosophical resignment at losing not only his sovereignty but the lady:

"Well, well — she'd probably have been a damned nuisance."

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5. The atmosphere in *Arizona* (true or false).

Chapter VI

ROMANTICISM

I — The Nature of Romanticism

Forms and moods.

In the preceding chapters I have discussed *forms* of the drama. I shall now discuss *moods.* I mean by this distinction that tragedy, comedy, farce, and melodrama are *moulds* into which dramatic material is poured; *moods,* on the other hand, are the particular *coloring* given that material, such as "romantic," "realistic," "classic." We may have a comedy like *As You Like It* and color it with a romantic atmosphere; or we may have a tragedy like *The Lower Depths* and color it with realism. Sometimes we have a blending of moods; that is, we have a play like Barrie's *A Kiss for Cinderella,* laid in realistic London slums, the characters speaking a vernacular of the streets, and then apply to it the romance of the Cinderella fable.[1] Or we may have one like Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome,* where romantic settings are treated with sophisticated realism.

Forms are definite and (with the exception of comedy) capable of definition. But moods are *not* definite and, therefore, *not* capable of definition.[2] If we know the in-

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[1] Most of Barrie's "fantasies" are realistic material romantically colored.

[2] I know that such terms as romanticism and realism have often been defined; but never satisfactorily and never in the same way by any two people. For varying definitions of *romanticism* I refer the student to

gredients of which romanticism is composed, we can "feel" our way into it. These ingredients are not hard and fast, and sometimes one combination is included and sometimes another.

Matter.

The "matter," "subject," or "content" (you may use any one of these terms) of a romantic play is apt to contain some combination of the following:

Remoteness. This means remoteness either in time or place. When the time is today, the place is apt to be far off, sometimes a mythical locale. Nobody knows where Shakespeare's "yellow sands" are. Occasionally plays are put into future time, as with the last part of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* which has a decidedly romantic flavor. Making a play contemporary often destroys its romance. I once knew a playwright who adapted Hawthorne's *Birthmark* and put it in a modern setting. If you know the story, you will remember that it is laid in a preceding age when little was known about science, and the mystery of alchemy had not given way to the practical knowledge of chemistry. What happened to Hawthorne's characters in that distant and romantic laboratory was acceptable, and the spiritual theme was not made ridiculous. But the moment we had a strictly modern atmosphere, we saw the implausibility of the whole thing. Our attempts to get romance into contemporary environments often fail for this reason. We can grasp it better in a subterranean passage of the Middle Ages than in a New York subway.

Professor Beers or Professor Babbitt, both listed in the bibliography at the end of this chapter.

3. **Heroism.** The principal figures of romantic drama are usually heroic. They may not be conventionally heroic; but they are fashioned in noble proportions. The commonplace man is not a suitable figure. Even Ibsen's Peer Gynt, weak and worthless though he was, gave himself the glamour of a hero, and precipitated himself into heroic situations.[3]

4. **Freedom.** Freedom is apt to be emphasized. The untrammeled soul or the soul which seeks to break its bonds is characteristic of a great many romantic plays.[4]

5. **Supernatural.** While this element is not so marked in plays as in stories, it has a considerable place in romantic drama. Often spirits like Ariel or sprites like Puck and Peter Pan are introduced. Again, the supernatural may exist in a mythical monster, such as the dragon in *Siegfried,* or in some magic property like the love potion of *Tristan and Isolde.*

6. **Type characters.** Plays written merely for the sake of romantic elements and not to expound some philosophy or dogma usually have many incidents and there is not time for highly individualized characterization. Also, since heroic and other grandiose demands restrict the characters, these are cast into types like melodrama figures.

7. **Mystery.** I do not refer here to the so-called "mystery play" (which is really a dramatized detective story), but to that sense of the mysterious which lends itself to beauty and charm. Perhaps the term *wonder* — as we find that quality in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* — might be suitable.

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[3] *Peer Gynt,* of course, comes under the head of satirical romance.

[4] Calderon, Victor Hugo, and the English romantic poets emphasize the idea of freedom.

Strangeness. Romance should have the fascination of strangeness. This, of course, can be effected by the remote; but some plays have strangeness even when they are immediate in both place and time. Philip Barry's *In a Garden* is an example.

Probability. Long ago Aristotle said that the *probable impossible* is better than the *possible improbable.* Let me tell you a story.

I am in your classroom attempting to teach you romance. You become so confused and bored that you can endure it no longer. You hurry from the room, fifty strong, and down the stairs out of the building. Several large automobile trucks are coming up the street. Excited, you rush in front of them. You are run over, the whole fifty of you, and killed.

Is that a good story? It is *possible.* It could be written up in the newspapers as true. But the amazing *fact* of its happening would be the only thing interesting. As fiction it doesn't do. It isn't *probable.*

Now let me tell you another. I am in your classroom attempting to teach you romance. You become so confused and bored that you can endure it no longer. At that moment a sharp, insistent tap is heard at the window. You look up. A huge bird, as large as the room, is looking in at you.

"Humph!" he says. "What are you wasting your time listening to him for? If you want to know what romance is, get on my back. *I'll* show you."

You take him at his word. Comfortably seated in his soft feathers, you find yourselves sailing over the landscape. The class pest, seeking to investigate the steering apparatus is flipped off into space, and all proceeds

happily. The bird lectures as he goes. You notice with interest, but no especial incredulity, that he is using a speaking trumpet similar to those employed at football games. Some of you ask foolish questions and are called to account. Suddenly you begin to hear dulcet tones from your midst:

> O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
> As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
> As is a winged messenger of heaven
> Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
> Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him,
> When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
> And sails upon the bosom of the air.

With delight you see your most popular member garbed in sixteenth century doublet and hose. Beside him, in silken robes and with a cap of pearls, is the class beauty. You have only to hear the next line:

> O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

to know that a love affair you never suspected exists among you. You have found romance.

Now that is not possible. But granting the premise of a more "remote," "heroic," "free," "mysterious," "wonderful," and "strange" world than ours, it becomes artistically *probable*.

The foregoing are not all the elements of romance, but from a consideration of them we should be able to get some idea of the *matter* contained in the average romantic play.

Treatment.

Treatment of romance is a little more difficult to discuss because it varies. The following points may be of value.

Looseness. There are no hard and fast rules for writing a romantic play. It need have no unity of time or place (though the best examples have unity of action). The author may indulge in poetic flights. He may expound lofty philosophies. He may insert extreme situations. In good romance these privileges are not abused, and the playwright does not become haphazard, nor swerve from the beaten path except to gain an effect unobtainable through conventional methods.

Warmth. The coldly logical or matter-of-fact has no part in romance, and even excitement, without warmth, is apt to result in melodrama. Romance should *glow*.

Expressiveness. The emotional or spiritual element in romance should exceed the intellectual. The play should have that sense of exaltation which carries its audience out of the realm of reality and into a world of its own creation.

The audience.

Exaltation in a romantic play should be met by what the Greeks called "artistic suspension of unbelief." Something of our childhood delight in fairy tales must be recaptured. We have little romantic drama in America because we will not encourage it. We exist in a scientific and commercial era, and the wonder of life that our pioneering grandparents knew is gone. We have not yet learned to accept the wonder of art. Afraid of appearing ridiculous when we catch ourselves responding to poetic emotions, we turn our response into derision. This tendency is epitomized in the first act climax of Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*. "The girl," left alone after her interview with the hero, reflects:

He said I had the face of an angel.
(*Then she blushes.*)
Oh hell!

That "Oh hell" attitude is all too prevalent; we must realize that a truly sophisticated audience is never ashamed.

Fantasy.

No sharp line can be drawn between romance and fantasy. Fantasy is primarily romantic, but in addition it is *whimsical.*[5] (Contemporary dramatic critics say "whimsy"; and to judge by many examples, their opprobrium is not unjustified.) Good fantasy will always have a place in the drama, for it requires a high type of creative vision.

II — The Study of Romanticism.

There has never been a time when romantic drama was non-existent. I know that some people term all ancient plays classic and all modern ones romantic or realistic; but that is an arbitrary division. Among the moods of the older plays there probably are many distinctions which are lost to us because we have not sufficient background. For this reason I am beginning my historical consideration of the subject nearer at home.

The Elizabethan era was, of course, greatly romantic. John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, and others left a heritage which Shakespeare found very valuable. In his last period (1608–1612) Shakespeare turned again to romanti-

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[5] The history of fantasy reveals many technical definitions; the word as understood now may be interpreted as *whimsicality* added to *romance.*

cism,[6] probably owing to the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher who strongly affected the early decades of the century.

The heroic play.

Corneille (1606–1684) belongs to the classical school, but his natural temperament was romantic and his best work is in this field. "The Cid" (1637) deals with what is known as the "love and honor" theme.[7] This theme had widespread popularity in France and England during the latter part of the century. It is a conflict between romantic love and a very artificial conception of honor; in the late development of the genre love always wins. Extravagant sentiments are presented in the most elegant heroic couplets.[8] The hero is usually a person of superhuman powers able to sway whole armies and accomplish the impossible:

> You can perform, brave warrior, what you please
> Fate listens to your words, and then decrees.[9]

In England "love and honor" plays accompanied the Restoration. Some people distinguish them from romantic dramas by calling them "heroic." The differences are mainly in degree of extravagance. Both types deal with love and honor, but in the heroic pieces the hero is a braggart and the heroine is more self-assertive. Being emotionally false, the genre lent itself to sentimentalizing, and by the nineteenth century had become neither flesh,

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[6] *A Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, The Tempest.*

[7] Edith Wharton's satirical arraignment of the 1870's, called *The Age of Innocence,* has been romanticized into a play of love and honor (1928).

[8] Two consecutive rhyming lines of iambic pentameter.

[9] John Dryden, *Conquest of Granada,* Act V.

fish, nor fowl. We have only to examine Bulwer Lytton's *Lady of Lyons* to see the level to which it had sunk.

"Hernani." [10]

Under the flamboyant Napoleonism of nineteenth century France romance became very popular. An excellent example is Victor Hugo's *Hernani.* It is filled with hidden passageways, conspiracies, moonlit love scenes, and exciting adventures; and its hero is of the cloak-and-sword variety made so popular by Byron.

Hernani makes no attempt at being profound. It is frankly for entertainment, and those who interpret it as an expression of philosophical and political life divert its real emphasis. The plot is well wrought, and the situations all "play." Note the opening dialogue; the hero makes his entrance through a secret door, and the short, staccato speeches between him and Doña Josefa are highly dramatic. *Hernani* abounds in hidden identities and grandstand speeches:

> If I were God, and had two sons, I'd make
> The elder God, the second, King of France.
> Act I.

At the climax of Act II, where modern stage lovers would end in a clinch, Hernani, showing the greatest restraint, kisses Doña Sol chastely upon the forehead. She swoons.

Despite its artificiality, however, *Hernani* is an excellent piece of work. It often rises to genuine poetry, as in the love scene in Act V, and again in the death scene. Like most of Hugo, it is tricky, but it shows the hand of a master.

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[10] *A Book of Dramas.*

Nineteenth century English romance.

The great romantic poets of the English nineteenth century turned their attention to the drama; but few of them created anything producible. Not only did they lack technical training, but they held in contempt the stage of their era and wrote for the library. Wordsworth achieved only one play (quite poor), and Keats but a fragment of one, while Coleridge contented himself mostly with adaptation. Shelley did some interesting romantic, semi-classic, and satirical drama that at least reads beautifully, though most of it cannot be played. Byron turned out eight pieces, including his famous "Manfred," and Browning has a number. Swinburne became so interested in the subject of Mary Queen of Scots that he wrote a whole series of plays about her, often referred to as "Swinburne's Mary mania." Tennyson was the most successful. His *Becket,* done by the late Sir Henry Irving, is a genuine drama.

In general, the plays of this group are but lyric and dramatic poems arranged as dialogue. Though profound in idea and beautiful in expression, they affected the stage very little because they were not seen there.

I should say that after 1800 the high spot in actable romantic English drama was struck by Stephen Phillips. Modern tendency has been to decry him as "cheap" and "sentimental," but I doubt if he deserves such censure. He passes the great test of the theatre admirably. His works quicken into life when presented, and if they are in the hands of good actors and good directors, they reveal few undramatic moments. Some years ago William Faversham put on Phillips's *Herod.* Though it lost money

because of the heavy expense, it was an unquestioned artistic success.

Love.

I do not suppose that any book of the drama is complete without a section on love (or "heart interest" as our managers like to call it), and certainly no place is more appropriate than a chapter on romance. We have grown accustomed to avoid genuine love scenes. We like the element, but we like it with nine-tenths of its beauty eliminated. A modern stage Romeo is apt to say, "Hang it all, Rosie! You know I'm strong for you, and — well — " He becomes inarticulate, and Rosie replies, "I'm on, old thing!" Perhaps that is usual in actual life; but I can't believe that "I love you" has gone completely into the discard. Another modern phase of the love theme is *psychology*. We hear about "Oedipus complexes," and "fixations," as though the age-old sentiment were a disease. In realism, of course, it is legitimate to present psychological aspects of love or sex, but romance should emphasize something more beautiful.

I shall endeavor to trace a few of the world's greatest love themes in equally great romances.

Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare gives us a highly conventional and objectified treatment of love. In reality few girls of fifteen or youths of twenty would have the creative power to speak like this famous duo. It is Shakespeare himself, with his training in several dozen love sonnets and the *Venus and Adonis*, who addresses us. Romeo and Juliet say what young lovers *ought* to say, not what they do say.

I used the term "objectified," by which I meant that the

characters are fully *expressed;* they give voice to their emotions with almost unnatural ease and in a medium readily understandable. We should accept this handling for the romantic beauty it allows and not make meticulous comparisons with fact.

2. *Paolo and Francesca.*[11] This play of Stephen Phillips is more subjective. The lovers are not so conscious of what is happening to them, and not so expressive; and while the piece loses in color, it gains in pathos. Note the device of introducing the Launcelot-Guinevere story in Act III. This heightens the dramatic content by giving a double meaning to the lines.

3. *Pélléas and Mélisande.* Maurice Maeterlinck uses a still more subjective treatment. Mélisande is hardly a human being. She is a child-soul, too fragile to cope with mortal existence. As Madame Georgette La Blanc, Maeterlinck's wife, used to play her, she seemed to come forth from the walls, like a grey shadow.

Mélisande comprehends neither love nor life, and through both she dies. The tower scene was hopelessly misunderstood when Miss Cowl did it here a few years ago. The lines at the beginning:

> St. Michael and St. Daniel; St. Daniel and St. Raphael
> I was born on a Sunday, a Sunday at high noon.

are a song known to every French child, and they reveal Mélisande's innocence and her unreadiness for the emotion that awaits her. Though she finally realizes love, she never understands its relation to life.

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[11] *Paola and Francesca* was revived in New York, 1924. Though it was not in all respects adequately cast, it amazed people by its beauty and rapidity of movement. Another revival was given in 1929.

Cyrano de Bergerac.[12] Since Walter Hampden's revival, few drama lovers in America are unfamiliar with this play. The love scene is one of the most famous in dramatic history. The great pathos of Cyrano's situation [13] is unsurpassed. Beneath the shadow of her window he hides, sending her his heart's song, and while Christian climbs up to receive the kiss, he waits below, despairing. But the great beauty in that despair makes it an exalted thing:

CYRANO

Yes, that is Love — that wind
Of terrible and jealous beauty, blowing
Over me — that dark fire, that music . . .
Yet
Love seeketh not his own! Dear, you may take
My happiness to make you happier,
Even though you never know I gave it you —
Only let me hear sometimes, all alone,
The distant laughter of your joy! . . .
I never
Look at you, but there's some new virtue born
In me, some new courage. Do you begin
To understand, a little? Can you feel
My soul, there in the darkness, breathe on you?
— Oh, but to-night, now, I dare say these things —
I . . . to you . . . and you hear them! . . . It is too much!
In my most sweet unreasonable dreams,
I have not hoped for this! Now let me die,
Having lived. It is my voice, mine, my own,

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12 Be sure to get the Brian Hooker translation of this play. No other has caught its loveliness.

13 He has consented, since he cannot make Roxane love him, to plead the cause of another.

That makes you tremble there in the green gloom
Above me — for you do tremble, as a blossom
Among the leaves — You tremble, and I can feel,
All the way down along these jasmine branches,
Whether you will or no, the passion of you
Trembling . . .

The Tristan and Isolde theme. Now turn to the greatest of them all. The legend or *Tristan and Yseult* begins in twelfth century Brittany when Chrétien de Troyes gave it to the Arthurian Cycle. A part of that cycle, it made its way over into England along with other French innovations and was included by Malory in his *Morte D'Arthur*. From this source Tennyson and others got it. In Germany the theme knew many variations (even a comic one), and the greatest handling of it is in Wagner's opera. I seldom hear it without observing in the audience scores of lovers, old and young. I know couples who have been married for many years and who never fail to make an annual pilgrimage to hear it. Beginning with the antithetical idea of *hate* (Isolde's hatred of Tristan as the destroyer of her kinsman) Wagner leads the pair, by means of the love potion, to the most intense mutual passion. This scene is done with consummate skill. The death potion had been intended, but through Brangaene's interference death becomes love, which gives Wagner an opportunity for his great climax. Love is too tremendous for life — it transcends life. The *Liebestod* or *Love-Death* is probably the most perfect romantic theme ever created.

"The Land of Heart's Desire."

This romantic fantasy is William Butler Yeats's best work. It presents Irish folklore and mystery with imagi-

native beauty that is kept from weakness by an acrid, ironic tang. Yeats has accomplished a difficult feat in making blank verse sound natural on the lips of peasants. There are passages of sheer lyric melody shadowed by tragical ones of foreboding, and the greatest delicacy has been used in interpolating homely expressions that might have ruined the rest. The story is effectively dramatized and climactic, and the scene where the Faery Child holds the others at bay while Mary Bruin makes her decision reaches a high emotional level. Nothing could be lovelier or more fatalistic than the final lines sung by the exultant "little folk" as they speed away with their captive:

> The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
> The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
> And the lonely of heart is withered away;
> While the faeries dance in a place apart,
> Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
> Tossing their milk-white arms in the air,
> For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
> Of a land where even the old are fair,
> And even the wise are merry of tongue;
> But I heard a reed of Coolaney say —
> 'When the win has laughed and murmured and sung,
> The lonely of heart is withered away.'

"A Minuet." [14]

One of the best examples I know of a romantic play by a contemporary writer is Louis N. Parker's *The Minuet*. Parker is a Frenchman who wrote the *Disraeli* which George Arliss starred in so successfully, and who translated many of the plays of Victorien Sardou. His romance is an exquisite vignette. Dealing with an aristocratic phase of

[14] *A Book of Dramas.*

the French Revolution, it combines the assumed hardness and scepticism of the upper classes with their innate bravery, nobility, and tenderness. The play is written in couplets of iambic tetrameter, a verse form well suited to a highly artificial era. Beginning with a cynical and atheistic note from Voltaire and emphasizing the unbending quality of the aristocracy, the piece progresses through a scene of wit combat tempered with sentiment, and culminates in a completely romantic refrain of tragic beauty. A Marquis, in prison, has been sentenced to the guillotine. He takes his fate philosophically and reads from Voltaire a passage denying the existence of heaven. The coarse and vulgar jailor enters to say that a woman has arrived. The woman turns out to be the Marquis's wife, with whom he has not lived for some time. She tells him that she has come to die with him, not for sentimental reasons, but because "a Beauclerc [15] could not fail." The scene that follows, in which both sophisticatedly attempt to hide their real feelings, gradually melts into an expression of emotional depth and beauty born of the memories they hold of their naïve courtship and early passion. This scene is made lyrically lovely by the repeated interpolation of the couplet:

> Ah me, what happy days were those,
> Gone with the perfume of the rose.

The Marchioness finally produces a withered rose, souvenir of their betrothal. She says that perhaps it will bloom again in heaven. He, recalling his former doubts, asks if there *is* a heaven. Before she can answer, the jailer appears and announces that the tumbril waits. The Mar-

[15] The family name of both.

chioness sways a moment with the shock. He repeats his question: "Is there a heaven, Doris?" She gains from the faded petals in her hand renewed courage. Smiling, she answers:

Come and see.

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Topics for Reports and Special Study.

1. The influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on the late work of Shakespeare.
2. The English inheritance of romance after the re-opening of the theatres in 1660.
3. The French influence on English romance during the Restoration.
4. The elements of wonder, remoteness, and so forth in *Romeo and Juliet.*
5. Corneille's romantic tendencies.
6. The combination of romance and comedy in Rostand.
7. The combination of romance and comedy in *Cyrano de Bergerac.*
8. The contribution of Stephen Phillips to English romanticism.
9. Phillips's use of romantic devices in *Paolo and Francesca.*
10. Shelden and the modern romantic touch.
11. Romance of locale as shown in Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West.*
12. Romantic touches in James Barrie.

Chapter VII

REALISM

I — The Nature of Realism.

I shall ask you to follow the terminology I suggested in connection with romanticism and to regard realism as a *mood* rather than a *form* of the drama. In a realistic play, such elements as "mystery," "wonder," "remoteness," are usually not possible, and the play often seems colorless compared with its romantic brother. Its one chance of holding the attention is its power to portray life — preferably a life the audience is familiar with. For this reason, plays which go well in one section of the country where their locale is understood, go badly in a different section. My advice is to make allowances for something outside your own way of living and to project yourself, through imagination, into the new atmosphere.

Description [1] of a realistic play.

A realistic play is one that gives us the truth of whatever phase of life it deals with.

Just what do we mean by "truth?" In the chapter on tragedy I spoke of Plato's conception of the *real.* The real is the *idea* or *ideal;* and what we often call the real is the *particular* or *actual.* Good art is an imitation of Plato's *real.* It gives the particular a universal significance, by

[1] I use the word *description* instead of *definition* because I do not feel that a dramatic *mood* can be adequately defined.

lifting it out of life into art.[2] When this can be achieved without losing the truth-to-life quality, the artist has secured the best form of realism. He has painted *real* life in the Platonic sense of the word. But when he has only succeeded in copying the *actual* photographically, his work is apt to be ignoble and sordid.

The sooner we recognize that *no* art can afford to be photographic, the sooner we shall do away not only with ugliness but with boredom. Take the average conversation of two people. Record it word for word and present it on the stage. It will sound stupid. The interesting passages are too much interspersed with meaningless, haphazard material. Even if the people are clever and have well ordered minds, what they say cannot go down verbatim. Nor do all the incidents of life have sufficient meaning to be dramatic, especially as they occur. A significant phrase or act is placed side by side with an insignificant one; the wrong word or wrong deed comes first; and the onlooker is confused. How often have you judged a person at first meeting, and then discovered that you had misunderstood his character? Even "hunches" are derived from a few chance external things a character does or says. An

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[2] "Nature is separated from Art by an enormous chasm, which genius itself is unable to bridge without external assistance. All that we perceive around us is merely raw material; if it happens rarely enough that an artist, through instinct and taste, through practice and experiment, reaches the point of attaining the beautiful exterior of things, of selecting the best from the good before him, and of producing at least an agreeable appearance, it is still more rare, particularly in modern times, for an artist to penetrate into the depths of things as well as into the depths of his own soul, in order to produce in his works not only something light and superficially effective, but as a rival of Nature, to produce something spiritually organic, and to give his work of art a content and a form through which it appears both natural and beyond Nature." Goethe, *Introduction to the Propyläen*, 1798, translation by Andrew Mott. *Harvard Classics* 39, p. 268.

audience goes to the theatre with (so far as knowledge of the specific play is concerned) a blank mind. Upon that blank mind must be written in orderly fashion the impressions that will lead to some sort of unified effect, both of character and of story; and those impressions must be accepted as representative. Remember always that a play is a representation and not a facsimile.

Beauty. Perhaps the word beauty more than any other distinguishes the good from the bad in realism. But because it is often a beauty of the artist's inner concept rather than an obvious, external beauty, we cannot always recognize it. Suppose, for instance, I present a New York slum and a group of ignorant, poverty-stricken, and even dissolute characters; but I present them as examples of their kind and as individuals, and show the universal brotherhood of man linking them to ourselves. If you are interested in New York slums, and sympathetic with the unfortunates found there, you will see *beauty* in what I have presented. But if you neither know nor care about such things, you will not be sympathetic, and you will tell me that what I have presented is "ugly." In fact, the principle of *cosmopolitanism* I spoke of in my chapter on comedy applies here. The greater your cosmopolitanism is in both knowledge and spirit, the greater will be your ability to see beauty where an artist of the *real* has created it.

II — The Study of Realism.

European realism.

Of course, there has always been realism of a sort, even in Greece and Rome, especially with low comedies. And the miracle and mystery plays in their more comic twists

were accurate expressions of local life: Elizabethan comedy abounded in the genre.

Modern realism begins in France in the nineteenth century as a reaction to the Napoleonic romanticism I have already mentioned. Extravagance of living had produced extravagance of thinking; and when disaster came, false philosophies were used to bolster up failing courage. France was caught in a net of brilliant and spectacular veils which concealed her real state. By the time of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 she was so weakened that she suffered hopeless defeat.

But even in the early part of the century many of her leading minds had issued warnings. The newer school of writers rebelled. Zola became the arch-enemy of romanticism. Flaubert, with his inheritance from a scientific father, delivered a bitter arraignment against false, romantic conceptions of life in "Madame Bovary." His pupil, de Maupassant, carried on the torch, as did dozens of others.

Dumas Fils. In the drama, realism came in about 1850. Alexandre Dumas fils is perhaps the most influential of the school. Brought up under a social stigma,[3] he opposed bitterly his father's romantic doctrines and devoted himself to painting "things as they are." *Camille* (produced in 1852) seems a bit stilted to us, but it was a violent and frank protest against the popular false drama. Dumas fils recognized the position Paris held as the fountainhead of European culture, and stated that once in five years every person of prominence, whether a representative of art, science, statesmanship, or commerce, passed through the capital city. He said that what was thought and done

[3] He is said to have had negro blood.

there influenced the utmost corners of the world. Therefore, he advocated a rigid correction of social evils. The prominence of Ibsen, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Maeterlinck has since made us forget him, but his mark is found again and again on our own drama. His influence on Pinero and Jones not only antedates that of Ibsen, but is probably greater.[4]

Émile Augier. Augier, too, was writing dramas of realistic protest. His *The Marriage of Olympe* (1855) is the story of a courtesan who weds a young count and is taken to live at the home of his conservative parents. Finding the life impossible, she reverts to type and causes disaster for herself and all concerned. Many points of *The Marriage of Olympe,* both in details of story and in the author's attitude of mind, are to be found in Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* and Eugene Walters's *The Easiest Way.*

English and American realism.

Realism in English drama began about the second half of the nineteenth century. I have already described the low state of English drama at that time. Dion Boucicault [5] is a deplorable example. You have only to compare his *Octoroon* with *Porgy* or *In Abraham's Bosom* [6] to see his complete insincerity. (The Abbey Theatre group regarded him as the worst enemy of the Irish Renaissance.)

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[4] Ibsen was not introduced into England until after Pinero and Jones were established, and it was some time before he was accepted. There has been a tendency among scholars to over-estimate the influence of Ibsen on English drama before 1900 and to under-estimate that of the French writers.

[5] In the season of 1928–9 his *After Dark* was produced in Christopher Morley's Hoboken theatre. It was taken for a cheap, superficial melodrama; yet in the old days it presumed to be "real" life.

[6] Two negro plays of recent date.

An interesting light is thrown on early drama in America through the play of *Fashion*. This famous piece was written in 1845 by Clara Mowatt, the daughter of a wealthy resident of Flatbush, Brooklyn. Criticisms were highly eulogistic, and only one adverse note was struck. Edgar Allan Poe said that as plays in general went, it was good, as American plays went, it was *very* good; but judged by the canons of dramatic art, it was impossible.[7] Considering that Poe was about the only contemporary American critic worth anything, we realize what the state of the drama must have been.

Tom Robertson. Robertson was the first Anglo-Saxon to rebel from that state. He was a young Englishman from the provinces, with little education and no influence. He conceived the idea of plays with natural characters and dialogue. He besieged every manager in London, but they laughed at his "simplicity." "It isn't art," they told him. "The public will never accept it. They want elegance of diction, noble sentiments, and thrilling incidents." Robertson finally succeeded in interesting Marie Bancroft, who secured a theatre for him on the outskirts of London where he was given free rein. If we examine the plays of Robertson, they seem sentimental and stupid; but for his time they were innovations. Soon all fashionable London was flocking to his playhouse. *Realism* became the rage — an inadequate and highly superficial realism, though a vast improvement on what had gone before.

Robertson was taken up in America with equal fervor. By the late seventies and early eighties Augustin Daly

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[7] Reprinted in the program of the Greenwich Village Theatre, New York, 1924 revival.

was featuring Clara Morris in *Society* and *Caste*. Apropos of the new movement an amusing and significant incident appears in Miss Morris's autobiography. Bustles were in style at that time, but Miss Morris, feeling that a part she was playing would be more natural without one, made her way to the "wings" one evening slim-lined as a modern flapper. Mr. Daly caught sight of her. In horror he grasped a huge mass of wire and straps and started in pursuit. "Miss Morris! Miss Morris!" he called. "You've forgotten your bustle." Miss Morris, without turning her head, hurried on, leaving the chagrined and shocked manager stranded with his ridiculous burden. I give this story to illustrate stage conventions not only of that day, but of any day. Drama is our most conservative art and is the last to accept new things and the last to relinquish old.

Robertson struck the first note of English realism, and Pinero and Jones, catching the deeper spiritual tones from France, fashioned a new drama. Historically they are of great importance, for without them as pioneers, we should never have been able to accept the men who followed. You need not make an extensive reading of their plays, but you should at least look into their more prominent works.

3. Henry Arthur Jones. A youth of Puritan stock, Jones arrived in London without ever having been to the theatre. He became a traveling salesman and got himself married early. When he turned to literature, his personal responsibilities made it necessary for him to do practical writing. For this reason he turned to melodrama and other popular material. However, he was for some time incapable of writing high-class plays; he was too immature, too uneducated, too inexperienced, and too lacking in profundity. He had little of the "pull" which made things

easier for Pinero, and at first he couldn't even get the attention of better grade managers.

Jones's most typical comedy is *The Liars*.[8] It has a conventional ending which is interesting to compare with the ending of Maugham's *The Circle*. The characters of this latter play do what they probably would do, whether we approve or not. In *The Liars* they do what society of the nineties expected of them. For a serious piece read *Mrs. Dane's Defense*. It was revived in New York in the winter of 1927 and an attempt was made to bring it up to date by the use of bobbed hair, short skirts, telephones, and automobiles. Those external modernities but marred the performance, for its spirit belongs to a former generation.[9] Though it appears unnatural, we must remember that the life it depicts was very restricted and that little allowance was then made for personal freedom. Its young hero, who today would decide his own marriage problem, is entirely subjugated to his uncle's will and seems a weak figure indeed. Henry Arthur Jones's death in 1929 ends one of the strongest bridges between the old and the new drama.

Sir Arthur Wing Pinero. Having the advantage of somewhat better surroundings, Pinero made a success earlier; but the first plays are of decidedly poor quality. *The Magistrate* (1885), his first good farce, was the model followed for many years by farce writers. Pinero's most famous play is *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. This piece, as I have already mentioned, shows the influence of Augier's *The Marriage of Olympe*, but makes some conces-

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[8] *Mary Goes First* (1915) is better, but *The Liars* belongs to a period when Jones was more influential.

[9] When first produced in London with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the leading role it created an unusual furor.

sions to the squeamishness of the English public. Nevertheless, it created such a disturbance at its premier that Mr. Alexander nearly withdrew it. Today we wonder what could have been the matter. When Miss Ethel Barrymore gave her revival in 1926, the audience frankly laughed over the moralizing at the end. But *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* still plays, and leaves one with profound respect for its author. The Barrymore production brought out an interesting point. Critics had believed that the entrance of Captain Ardale in the third act introduced melodrama. According to printed stage directions, he enters through a French window — an unnatural and "tricky" deed for a caller at a private home. Miss Barrymore's setting revealed a wide expanse of terrace upon which several glass doors opened. Any one familiar with English country houses could easily imagine how a visitor entering the "park" and coming upon the terrace could confront whoever was inside. The mere removal of that mechanical difficulty did much toward lessening the melodramatic impression. Read *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* if you are not familiar with it. It should be a part of everyone's drama experience.

There are three plays later in Pinero's career which were not very popular but which should be considered. They show what the dramatist would have *liked* to do if his public had been ready for it. They are *His House in Order, Mid-Channel,* and *The Thunderbolt.* The last is his best play. It was not well received because it has not the color and the thrill of his more stagy pieces, and it has practically no "heart interest." Neither the plot nor idea calls for a love affair, though Pinero, not daring to be too radical, tied the heroine up rather perfunctorily with the

family lawyer, whom he made young and single for this purpose.

Henrik Ibsen. The final decade of the nineteenth century brought a great impetus which has resulted in our present drama. Teutonic and Scandinavian dramatists, until then unheard of, changed the whole complexion of realism and relegated the older English drama to the category of popular entertainment.

The first Titan was Ibsen. I shall never forget my introduction to him some years ago when I had just left the professional stage and was turning my attention to things academic. An erudite graduate student caught me red-handed with *A Doll's House*. "Ah!" he said. "The Ibsen phase! *I* went through that." Of course I blushed. As the years passed and I saw people sweep the old Scandinavian aside, and read articles on his antiquated technique and prehistoric ideas, I began to wonder what was the matter with me that I couldn't get out of the "phase." Latterly, I am less distressed, for the flock of Ibsen revivals [10] circling about me, is very reconciling. I am conscious that where his contemporaries seem out of date, he is ever revivified. This is probably because he presents ideas in terms of that same universal human nature which makes Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* sister to the modern bootlegger's widow. Ibsen's "problems" become obsolete, but his characters live on.

We all have a tendency to judge plays by our interest in their problems. This is wrong. We should never forget our motto — "the play's the thing." Ibsen may have been a sociologist of no mean order, and may have felt

[10] There hasn't been a season in several years without from two to six professional Ibsen productions in New York.

keenly the evils of his time. But he was first and foremost a dramatist. *Ghosts,* for instance, was for years considered *passé.* It dealt with scientific questions that had long been settled, that even were misconceptions on Ibsen's part. Then along came Eleonora Duse and gave the most moving performance of the piece America had even seen. Mrs. Fiske in her much criticized but interesting interpretation followed, and later Moissi did the play in German. *Hedda Gabler* has been revived no fewer than four different times in as many years, and *The Wild Duck, The Lady from the Sea, John Gabriel Borkman, The Master Builder, An Enemy of the People,* and *A Doll's House* have received from one to three professional reproductions apiece. These are all realistic plays, with varying degrees of symbolism. I have already outlined in detail *Hedda Gabler,* so I do not wish to give further space to Ibsen here. I shall merely recommend *A Doll's House* and *The Master Builder* as additional study.

5. John Galsworthy. The greatest serious realist in modern England is John Galsworthy.[11] Much in his work is fine, but unlike Ibsen he can never subordinate his sociology to his art. He is the preacher first, the dramatist second. An early work, *The Silver Box,* reveals this. When properly produced, it gives greater artistic satisfaction than his recent plays.

Galsworthy is a staunch admirer of the Russians and probably was more influenced by them than by Ibsen. He lacks, however, their emotional force. His chief virtue is sincerity, and one never feels that he is doing anything merely for effect.

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[11] I am not of those who place Galsworthy in the school of "naturalism."

August Strindberg. Strindberg's influence came late and was felt more in America [12] than in England. I have heard the question raised whether Strindberg did not go too far in his realistic portrayal. My reply is, read *The Father,* and judge for yourself; it is, at least, a very powerful play. Up to the present Strindberg has been done too little in this country, and perhaps has been talked about and imitated too much; this is partly the reason for our native psychological drama becoming psycopathic.

Russian realism.

Russia has come so recently into our cultural lives that she has not had time to affect us vitally. The Russian plays are well worth studying. Tchekhoff's *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters* are among the best. Anton Tchekhoff is one of the few men in the older group who understand much about technique. Until recently, the Russians have been faulty in this respect. They have the greatest spiritual profundity of any race in the world, and their emotional force is tremendous, both of which qualities make their characterizations splendid. But they have not been able to plot. A Russian will talk to you all night, deeply and interestingly, but by morning you will have derived no philosophy and no sense of order concerning what he has said. In the same way, the Russian dramatist will probe the depths of the human soul, paint striking and tremendous pictures; but will give you at the final curtain a feeling that you have been borne all over the face of the earth without any artistic design or unity. A Russian dramatist will decide suddenly in the middle

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[12] O'Neill is much indebted to Strindberg.

of his play that he needs to show some particular trait in his hero; he will create a whole scene and a number of new characters. Not merely is this, from the producer's standpoint, a waste, but it compels an audience to familiarize itself with fresh personalities and situations instead of finding dramatic fulfillment in those already familiar. This tendency may be due to the fact that Russian civilization is very recent. As late as the nineteenth century Russia was merely imitating European culture; then suddenly she experienced racial consciousness. The difference between her and us lies in the fact that while we were a new nation with no traditions or background Russia was age-old, spiritually and emotionally, and needed but the intellectual touch to waken her from adult dormancy. The sudden realization of her power was unbalancing. Without a slow and formulative development to her advantage, she had no sense of proportion. Mass and force overcame form, and produced chaos.[13] Tchekhoff, her finest dramatist, did not suffer from this defect, for he made a close study of French form. The newer Slavic writers, such as Leonid Andreyev, have frankly gone to the Continent for their training.

"The Cherry Orchard." [14]

While to some this play seems disjointed, a close investigation will show that it is not. Tchekhoff's theme is *waste*; the cultural heritage of the aristocracy was lost, more by their own vacillation than by opposition from the masses. The good perished with the bad, and each class

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[13] I shall have more to say about this in connection with "expressionism."

[14] *A Book of Dramas.*

was left impoverished. The Russian aristocracy had a tendency to procrastinate — to seek refuge from the facts of life by dreaming — and this theme, being the very crux of Tchekhoff's play, demanded especial emphasis. That is why the much discussed second act has no plot advance. The scene is a static and pastoral picture in which each person is concerned with his own reflections, and in which there is no pulling together. Tchekhoff wrote a whole act to show this; but he did not scatter his material promiscuously as Tolstoy and others did.

A comparison might be made between the technique of *The Cherry Orchard* and of *Hedda Gabler*. Ibsen, you will remember, created his play in a thoroughly rational manner. *The Cherry Orchard,* while not irrational, expresses a *mood;* it therefore must add to its rational presentation a general atmospheric effect. Tchekhoff succeeds splendidly in producing this effect.

An interesting point occurs at the end of Act III where Lopakhin exults in his purchase of the cherry orchard. Reading this scene, you gather the impression that Lopakhin holds centre stage; but witnessing it, you discover it is Madame Ranevskaya who commands attention. She says not a word, merely sits at one side weeping; but by some subtle implication Tchekhoff and the actors (for both are responsible) emphasize the important thing — the result of what has happened upon the aristocracy.

The last note in the play is *waste*. Madame Ranevskaya and her family have departed, and Firce, a symbol of worn-out utility, is left behind. He sleeps, and you hear the stroke of the axes on the cherry orchard. The old social order is passing; beauty that might have been saved is being laid waste.

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2. The realistic reaction to English romanticism in the nineteenth century.
3. The contribution of Alexandre Dumas fils to realism.
4. Robertson, the pioneer in English realism.

5. Jones and Pinero, the connecting links between the old and new drama.
6. Russian realism as shown in Tchekhoff.
7. Truth to fact and truth to spirit in realism.
8. The realistic qualities of *The Wild Duck*.
9. The mixture of realism and symbolism in *The Wild Duck*.
10. O'Neill's contribution to American realism.
11. Sidney Howard's handling of realistic comedy.
12. Realism and sensationalism in Noel Coward.
13. The beautiful and ugly as shown in *The Easiest Way*.
14. Realism of locale as shown in *Sun-Up* or *In Abraham's Bosom*.
15. The photographic realism of *What Price Glory*.

Chapter VIII

SENTIMENTALISM

I — The Nature of Sentimentalism.

Sense	Sentimentality
Sensible	Sensitive
Sensuous	Sensibility
Sentiment	Sentimentalism

I should like you to look at these words closely. They are all related; yet time has broken the bonds between them, and diverted their meanings. They are all legitimate; yet man has exalted some and demeaned others.

Sense, sensible, and sensuous. The popular idea of the first two is contained in the phrase "good sense" or "common sense." But really they are elements that make up what psychologists call "perception" or "susceptibility to impressions" — in other words, the state of being *alive* to a thousand and one physical things which the artist or scientist is conscious of, but which the layman, particularly he who prides himself on his "good" or "common" sense is not. This gives them pretty much the same meaning as the third word, *sensuous* (which, by the way, should not be confused with *sensual* as implying highly sexed).

Sentiment and sentimentality. Here we get a derogatory meaning. Originally a "sentimental" man was a man inclined to *sentiment,* but gradually this connotation gave way to one less complimentary. Nowadays people tell

you with pride, "Oh, I have *sentiment*. But thank God I am not *sentimental*." But if you question them as to examples of sentiment and sentimentality, you find there is great variance in their conceptions. For instance, some will tell you that Carrie Jacobs Bond's song *A Perfect Day* is a beautiful expression of "sentiment," but that the typical "mammy song" is "sentimentality." Others will put both these into the category of sentimentality, but will extol the music of Puccini— whom still others regard as hopelessly sentimental. I have a friend who objects to my playing Victrola records of Tschaikowsky's symphonies because he says that the great Russian is "sentimental"; on the other hand I have known him to grow maudlin over *Just a Song at Twilight*. I fully expect some day to hear Bach referred to as "sentimental," though what the purists will do then I'm sure I don't know.

We must make very wide allowances for individual tastes, and we must remember that in this matter tastes vary more than in any other which has to do with art. So much depends upon a person's particular background or experience — associations that have endeared or estranged certain things. An American will be more apt to sympathize with what is typically American than with what is typically Japanese; the Japanese may interest him because it is remote and strange, but the American will draw his heartstrings. Moreover, what moves us at present may have left us cold a year ago, for in the meantime we have come to know and love the phase of life it expresses. In fact, personal sympathy is the greatest factor in all art criticism; and no amount of sophisticated broadening or objectified, impersonal attitude will overcome it. Perhaps this is just as well, for the critic who is absolutely

impartial is not usually a real critic. He judges only by standards he has memorized as such, and he lacks that modicum of feeling which would make his criticism living.

We have recently experienced (at least in "highbrow" circles) much censure of "pretty-pretty" art, and some of us have gone to the opposite extreme. We have become "hard boiled." We are afraid to show the slightest feeling for fear we shall be called sentimental. On the other hand, our natural emotions, rising to the surface in spite of ourselves, respond to the same old lures. We finally compromise by labelling these lures "sentiment" and those which appeal to our neighbors "sentimentality."

Many genuine sentiments are made obnoxious by exploitation. "Mother love," "patriotism," "friendship" are in themselves noble and beautiful; but they may be cheapened by a false or superficial treatment. When I was in vaudeville those "turns" which exploited the American flag were dubbed "kind applause acts," and eventually the Keith and Proctor theatres forbade all use of the national colors.

People are often swept away by sentimental hysteria. I once saw on "amateur night" a wretched and drunken little old man come out on the stage and attempt to sing. He was hissed and cat-called, and objectionable missiles were flung at him. Suddenly he pulled a penny American flag from his pocket and waved it as he sang. A wad of paper accidently hit the flag. Some one in the audience called out: "Stop insulting the flag!" In two minutes there was a free-for-all which was more of an insult to the flag than the wad of paper.

I am inclined to think that the *degree of perfection* with which a thing is done sometimes determines the difference

between sentimentalism and sentiment. In drama the acting is often a determining factor. What would *The Two Orphans* have been without Kate Claxton, or *Rip Van Winkle* without Joseph Jefferson, or *Daddy Longlegs* without Ruth Chatterton? All these are sentimental, yet all of them have "got" intelligent people.

For myself, I don't object to being "got." I'd much rather cry over something on the stage than in life. We all have a certain quota of tears locked up somewhere, and if we can get rid of them over things impersonal to us, we are apt to be less self-centred and more humane. I have never discovered that tears shed in a public theatre resulted in anything more than temporary embarrassment; it's those shed in private which cause mischief.

3. **Sensitive.** This word is the key to all the others. A sensitive harpstring will vibrate if played upon; a sensitive human being will respond if the chords of his nature are touched. Sensitiveness is no longer considered a weakness, for it has been definitely discovered to imply a highly vital organism — a positive factor in human makeup rather than a negative one. Modern psychologists in their studies of personality have found that the sensitive person is the one most responsive to impressions, and that if these impressions are properly correlated and utilized, the result is constructive and creative. I do not intend here an intricate discussion of psychology, but unquestionably Walter Pater's aesthetic theory of "sense" is a direct bearing out of these sensitive impressions and their relation to art. The audience as well as the artist must be sensitive. They must *feel* the emotion an artist *expresses*. If the emotion is finely expressed, the feeling may be sentiment; if the emotion is not finely expressed, the feeling may be senti-

mentality. In either case the audience has got to have the capacity for feeling.

Sensibility. Professor Ernest Bernbaum has written the finest dissertation we have on what he calls *The Drama of Sensibility*. He uses this term "sensibility" because it is the authentic one to describe the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century, the period he deals with particularly: "The drama of sensibility, which includes sentimental comedy and domestic tragedy, was from its birth a protest against the orthodox view of life, and against those literary conventions which had served that view. It implied that human nature, when not, as in some cases, already perfect, was perfectible by an appeal to the emotions. It refused to assume that virtuous persons must be sought in a romantic realm apart from the everyday world. It wished to show that beings who were good at heart were found in the ordinary walks of life. It so represented their conduct as to arouse admiration for their virtues and pity for their sufferings. In sentimental comedy, it showed them contending against distresses but finally rewarded by morally deserved happiness. In domestic tragedy, it showed them overwhelmed by catastrophes for which they were morally not responsible. A new ethics had arisen and new forms of literature were thereby demanded." [1]

Sentimentalism.

I have chosen this term as a title for my chapter partly because it harmonizes with the other chapter headings, but principally because the words I have already discussed are either not inclusive or have received derogatory asso-

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[1] P. 10.

ciations through being applied to poor and cheap works of art.

Subjects of sentimentalism.

There are some subjects which lend themselves more readily than others to sentimentalism. Any well-rendered expression of mother love is sure of wide appeal, and family love has no serious rival unless it be the sentimental treatment of mate love. Patriotism, desire for freedom, and friendship are good material. Community love is of less value, and the ideals, *per se,* of art or science, or of individual professions are doubtful indeed. Poverty and bodily illness, being more easily comprehended than ills of the spirit, rate high in sentimental appeal; yet even here much depends upon the subject. A poor woman is better than a poor man unless he is a husband and father, and a poor woman who is also a widow and a mother ranks one hundred per cent. A poor school teacher isn't bad; but a poor shop girl is much better. Even among the animals there are favorites. A distressed dog is better than a distressed cat, and either is many times better than a distressed cow, or pig, or chicken. With matters of bodily ailment, those ills that may be romanticized, like heart trouble or tuberculosis, have the advantage over even serious diseases of the stomach and intestines. In like manner, afflictions of the senses vary in their appeal. Blindness is extremely useful; but deafness is almost impossible except as comic material. This is because the deaf person seems stupid, while the blind seems romantically helpless. *Quincy Adams Sawyer, Adrea,* and *The Two Orphans* have blind heroines, and D'Annunzio's *The Dead City* contains one of the best blind characters in the history of romantic drama.

Children in sentimentalism. Ill-treatment of children has produced a large amount of sentimental drama. I know of no better example than Shakespeare's *King John* where the rough but humane Hubert attempts to fulfill John's orders to burn out the eyes of young Prince Arthur. The struggle which goes on within his hairy breast, increased by the innocent pleading of Arthur, makes a superb bit of sentimentalism.

Fortunately there has never been any important dramatization of the *Little Elsie* books. I shudder to think of the resultant wave of morbidity. The death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has its companion-piece in the death of Little Willie in *East Lynne*. For a comparison of these cheap exhibitions with one of genuine sentiment we have only to look at the death of little Eyolf in Ibsen's play of that name. When news is brought to Eyolf's parents that their cripple child has followed the Rat Wife to the water's edge and been drowned, we get just one tragic line: "Only the crutch was there — floating on the water." The restraint of that line is worth all the Little Evas and Little Willies in Christendom.

Appreciation of sentimentalism.

There is no need (as with qualities of romanticism and realism) to train yourself in the appreciation of sentimentalism. Granting that the sentimental play is well written, it will appeal or not irrespective of any study given it. If you happen to be impressed by a certain sort of sentimentalism, the play will have its effect; if not, you will brand it as sentimentality. The only way to increase your appreciation of the genre is to increase the span of your human interests and sympathies. When you have in

some measure eliminated barriers of race, sex, social position, intellect, and religion, you will have a broader conception of "the brotherhood of man," and will be able to judge sentimentalism by the perfection with which it is done. At its best, it forms a needed contrast to the coldness of classicism, the extravagance of romanticism, and the ruthlessness of realism. It is the humane leveler of the drama.

II — The Study of Sentimentalism.

English sentimentalism.

English sentimentalism received its first important impetus in 1697 through the attack of Collier on *The Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* The attack was in part deserved. The dramatists had gone too far and were due a reprimand. But that reprimand should have come from a dramatic critic. Collier knew nothing about the drama. Instead of showing that the worst of the Restoration dramatists were shaming the genre in which they worked by displaying a woeful lack of manners in their plays, he based his onslaught upon strictly moral grounds and missed his aim. He left loopholes for his opponents to pierce. A war raged for ten years, and Queen Anne herself was brought into it. One man came out with an anonymous book entitled *The Stage Condemned.* Another followed with *The Stage Acquitted.* Pamphlets and speeches grew numerous and all too vitriolically personal. The result was that Congreve, their finest writer, left the stage in a huff. The comedy that immediately followed, such as Farquhar's "Beaux' Stratagem," was more wholesome but less brilliant and finished, and it soon gave way to plays of false morals and sticky sen-

timentality.[2] This was more injurious to a proper understanding of life than any amount of indecency. Artistically, the English drama fell with a thud, and save for one or two exceptions, its plays remained at a low level until very recent years. Of course, political changes were partly responsible. William of Orange, coming to the throne in 1688, had brought Dutch courtiers and Dutch customs to take the place of the French. And France herself had changed. The *drame-larmoyante,* or "drama of tears" had become the vogue and was imported into England. By 1750 English plays were so mawkish and puerile that thinking people ceased going to the theatre. Hugh Kelly in his *False Delicacy* (1768) attempted a rescue. This play, once thought an extreme example of sentimentality, is now considered something of a satire on it. But Kelly did not laugh the evil out of existence.

Goldsmith and Sheridan. Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan hated profusely the hypocritical sentimentalism of their age.[3] Goldsmith wrote *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) in an attempt to condemn display of false grief at funerals, and his *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) was to show what could be done with simple comic devices treated honestly. This latter play is really more farce than comedy; but it is sound. Sheridan, suffering

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[2] Addison's *Cato* is typical of a number of *neo-classic* plays; but English eighteenth century drama in general is regarded as sentimental.

[3] "The author submits it to the reader in his closet; and hopes that too much refinement will not banish humor and character from ours as it already has done from the French theatre. Indeed, the French comedy is now become so very elevated and sentimental, that it has not only banished humor and Molière from the stage, but it has banished all spectators too." Goldsmith, Preface to *The Good-Natured Man,* The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. II, Bell ed. 1884, p. 146.

the thrusts of gossips because of his elopement and hasty marriage at Bath, wrote *The School for Scandal* (1777). It is revived constantly,[4] and all drama lovers should acquaint themselves with it. The character of Joseph Surface is a satire on the sentimental hero, to whom Charles, the reckless but honest brother, forms a happy contrast. For sheer dramatic technique there is little to surpass the famous "screen scene." The audience knows that Lady Teazle is hidden behind the screen, learning all that her husband really feels about her. Then comes the dramatic moment when the screen is thrown down and she confronts him. There are two staccato speeches; one from Charles, "Lady Teazle! By all that's wonderful," and one from the confounded Sir Peter, "Lady Teazle! By all that's damnable!" A dramatic pause follows, and then the great speech. The true ringing quality of this speech against the falsity which has preceded it is the stuff real drama is made of. Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) is also an arraignment.[5] It ridicules the absurd juggling of "honor" in the matter of duels. The heroine, a satire on the cloying damsel, is appropriately named "Lydia Languish"; the scene in which Lucy, her maid, brings the leading sentimental books of the period for her mistress to read is an arrow pointing in a significant direction. Perhaps the most definite of all Sheridan's satires is *The Critic*[6] (1779). This deals directly with a typical theatrical production of the times and jibes unmercifully at its absurdities.

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[4] There have been three professional revivals in New York within recent years, one by Ethel Barrymore.

[5] Recently revived by Mrs. Fiske, Tom Wise, Chauncey Olcott, and Tom Powers.

[6] Revived at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, 1926.

It is a pity that these two men could not have done more for the cause. Goldsmith was a lazy, intermittent playwright at best, and Sheridan, while still a young man, deserted the stage for a brilliant career in Parliament. Even with the work they had begun, if only there had been some one to follow in their footsteps, we might have been spared a persistence of the poorest and cheapest sort of drama in our history.

Nineteenth century sentimentalism. The nineteenth century consoled itself mostly with third-rate dramatists like Bulwer-Lytton and fifth-rate ones like Dion Boucicault, or else revivals of an earlier and greater age. If you question your grandparents about the dramatic glories of their youth, you will find them talking about *actors,* not *plays.* They will tell you of Booth and Barrett and Forrest; but when you ask what plays these men did, you will find, in nine cases out of ten, either sentimental drivel or Shakespeare. A period of revivals is always a sign of contemporary impoverishment, and a period when emphasis is laid on acting is always a period of poor plays.

Modern period.

There is hardly a season that does not have its quota of sentimental plays. Sometimes they are of small-town life, meant to catch the people who hail from small towns. A play like *Skidding*[7] falls into this category. There is not much to study in it, because it is written according to a commercial formula and contains very little of what might be called genuine creation. Other modern sentimental plays deal with "homey" characters that are apt to have

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[7] Produced with great success in New York, 1928.

their counterparts in the sentimental memories of the audience. *Lightnin'* was this type; though a poor play, it enjoyed a tremendous popularity. In New York there is usually at least one Jewish play a year, quite different from the real Jewish drama of Pinski or Sholom Ash, and depicting superficially popular Jewish-American sentiments. The great example of this, of course, is *Abie's Irish Rose,* which combines Jewish and Irish elements together with the popular appeals of democracy, domesticity, patriotism, religion, filial love, heart interest, and motherhood. No wonder it swept everything before it.

I have no quarrel with *Abie's Irish Rose*'s, for the audience they cater to can never be reached by anything more subtle. Such pieces are honest and serve an honest purpose. I have, however, quarrel with those plays *pretending* to be art, in which the characterization is good enough to be taken for real, but which betray both art and the public by exploiting their very excellence for cheap sentimentality.

The Old Lady Shows Her Medals. For a reading of sentimental plays, I need recommend only two or three. An excellent example is Barrie's *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals.* This tells the story of a London charwoman who felt so keenly having no son in the War that she invented one. She selected a brawny Scotch lad in the "Black Watch," sent him cakes and knitted clothing in the name of a fashionable war patroness, and exhibited to her friends a packet of letters purporting to be his. When accidentally he turns up and attempts to give her "an ugly piece of his mind" for her fraud, she so appeals to him that in spite of himself he adopts her as his mother. The parting between them at the end of his "leave" is exceed-

ingly pathetic, and later when she receives news of his death and gathers together her "medals" — the War Savings Certificates, Kenneth's bonnet, a thin packet of real letters, the famous champagne cork (relic of their last dinner) — and puts them away in her drawer, we get one of the few rare passages of sublime sentiment in dramatic literature.

Madame Butterfly.[8] This theme — written first in narrative form by John Luther Long, turned into a one act play by David Belasco and played by Blanche Bates in 1905, then turned into an opera by Puccini and sung by Caruso and Geraldine Farrar — has gained almost as much fame as the legend of Tristan and Yseult. As most people know, *Madame Butterfly* is the tale of Cho Cho San, child wife of the American Mr. Pinkerton, who has taken advantage of the Niponese marriage laws to avail himself of a temporary domestic ménage during his sojourn in Japan. After his departure, his wife bears him a son, and refusing all offers of new marriages, awaits her husband's return. When he comes, accompanied by a Caucasian wife, Cho Cho San places her baby on the doorstep, with the American flag in its hand; she then commits suicide. The popularity of this story, despite the fact that its heroine is of a race totally different from that of most of her admirers, is clear proof of its inherent effectiveness and the skill of the various artists into whose hands it has fallen.

"The Cricket on the Hearth."[9]

There is probably no more suitable period for the illus-

[8] Printed in Quinn's *Representative American Plays*, 1928.
[9] *A Book of Dramas.*

tration of sentimentalism than the Victorian; the best and the worst of sentimental drama is to be found here. Dickens, the great "heart" writer, was at this time influencing the entire field of English literature, and several of his stories found their way, almost without change, to the stage. Albert Smith dramatized *The Cricket on the Hearth,* preserving in many cases the actual wording of the original; and this piece, after a successful run in London, took its place beside *The Rivals* and *Rip Van Winkle* in the permanent repertory of the American Joseph Jefferson. *The Cricket on the Hearth* is a simple story of home and fireside. Its foundations are perfectly sound, and even if it lays on the "feeling" a bit too obviously, there are few of us so sophisticated that we cannot respond to its appeal. The characters are all likable: young chirrupy little Dot is a good foil for her lumbering, good-natured husband; and old Caleb Plummer (the part Jefferson made famous) with his blind daughter are two of the most pathetic and lovable creatures in drama. Of course, the plot lacks subtlety, and the ending, with its unnatural metamorphosis of the gruff old Tackleton, is forced; but the piece as a whole plays with conviction. Bertha is an excellent example of "blind" sentimentalism. The scene in which she learns the truth about her surroundings and the people she dearly loves is very genuinely touching. The least effective portions of the play are its soliloquies, and these (like most soliloquies in modern drama) are largely dispensable. With but slight cutting *The Cricket on the Hearth* would seem no more extreme than nine out of ten current dramas of popular sentiment, and it is far nearer to human truth than most of them. It proves the fact that because an emotion is universal enough to be recog-

nized by everybody, it is not undeserving of a place in good art.

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2. The sentimental contribution of George Lillo.
3. The revolt of Goldsmith and Sheridan to sentimentality.
4. The effect of sentimentalism on Victorian drama.
5. Sentimental qualities in *The Return of Peter Grimm.*
6. Modern sentimentalism (the term defined and illustrated in a modern play).

Chapter IX

NATURALISM

I — The Nature of Naturalism.

In the first place, I must say that I do not see exactly how "naturalism" differs from "realism." I have heard such men as Ibsen and Dumas referred to as naturalists. In case they are, I am at a loss to know who are the realists.

Naturalness.

There are in connection with naturalism two general interpretations. One is the doing of things *naturally*. That is, we present life as we find it — in dialogue, in action, in the simplicity with which the plot is evolved, and also in the stage sets, directing, and acting. This seems to me the exact standard of realism, photographic or lifted into *real* art as the case may be. A good naturalist, like Hauptmann, handles his plays pretty much the same as a good realist like Ibsen. It is only when the good of either kind are compared with the poor of the opposite that distinctions are observable.

Independence of form.

The second interpretation given to naturalism is independence of form; in other words, the doing away with established forms and principles of the theatre, and the free expression of anything in any way. Why the term "naturalism" should be applied to this, any more than

the term "expressionism" or "impressionism" I'm sure I don't know. All too often "independence" means that the playwright is either too lazy to know or follow established forms, or else that he is so intent upon striking his audience with something amazing and thus exploiting his own ego that he will resort to any expedient. Even well established dramatists are sometimes guilty of this. In the recent turning of the tide against O'Neill critics have accused him of such practices.[1, 2] Whether their accusations are just or not remains to be seen; but unquestionably Mr. O'Neill has laid himself open to them, for he says in speaking of his "Big Grand Opus," that it will be neither a play nor a novel but "there will be many plays in it and it will have greater scope than any novel I know of. Its form will be altogether its own — a lineal descendant of 'Strange Interlude' in a way but beside it 'Interlude' will seem like a shallow episode."[3] When this attitude of extreme independence is taken by an established man, what can one expect of the little fellows — the untrained and uninspired whose only hope of attracting attention is to ballyhoo?

Rules and precepts that are sound have never yet ham-

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[1] "With the aid of curtains, lights and mass psychology, it is possible for a man to palm himself off as a creative genius merely by pulling rabbits out of a silk hat. Indeed, O'Neill has been shrewd enough to vary the familiar trick by using vipers and scorpions instead of bunnies." Heywood Broun, *The New York Telegram,* February, 1929.

[2] "'Dynamo' is so much pseudo-highbrow hooey, a heavy-handed childish opus in which the would-be great American playwright 'shakes his fist at God and blows kisses in the general direction of electricity,' a humorless and infantile exposition of what any intelligent schoolboy ought to know." Robert Garland, *The New York Telegram,* February, 1929.

[3] From an open letter of O'Neill's to George Jean Nathan, published in the *American Mercury,* January, 1929.

pered a playwright. They are founded on perfectly human capacities and limitations in the receptivities of the audience. They are a boon rather than a drag, and when a genuine artist, knowing them, deliberately chooses to abandon one (as I have said Tchekhoff did in *The Cherry Orchard*), he does it because the particular piece he has in mind requires it.[4] The requirement is *for a definite reason,* and the artist can always tell you, without being sophistical, definitely what that definite reason is — which is more than the mere rule-breaker can do. In fact, such an artist is not a rule-breaker but a *rule-maker.* He has discovered a way of conveying something to an intelligent and imaginative audience which could not have been conveyed by already existing methods. Of course, every exponent of a new "ism" will tell you that this is what his particular ism does. Only once in five hundred times he is right, as the rapidity with which isms come and go proves.

Zola, the grandfather of the naturalists, tells us that he does not approve of schools, formulas, or standards; he says that life itself is a huge field in which each person may investigate and create what he chooses.[5] Contrast with this the more penetrating judgment of Goethe in the same matter: "The genuine law-giving artist strives for the truth of art, the lawless artist who follows a blind impulse strives for the reality of Nature; through the former, art reaches its highest summit, through the latter,

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[4] . . . the Rules of the Stage are not founded upon Authority, but upon Reason; they are not so much settled by Example as by the natural judgment of Mankind." *The Whole Art of the Stage,* written in French by the command of Cardinal Richelieu by Monsieur Hedelin, Abbot of Aubignac, and now made English, London, 1684, p. 22.

[5] *Le Roman expérimental,* pp. 89–127, "Le Naturalisme au Théâtre."

its lowest stage." [6] Again, Coleridge, in one of his lectures,[7] says: "If there be likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting, and the more complete the delusion, the more loathsome the effect."

If by independence the naturalists mean a revolt from artificial and false plays of the early nineteenth century, they do not differ from the realists, who made that same revolt. I therefore cannot see why, with either of the two interpretations of naturalism I have mentioned, we should make a distinction between it and realism.

Other theories of naturalism.

T. H. Dickinson [8] gives as qualities of naturalism "balance," "impassivity," and "a consistent external view of life." But a combination of these three qualities does not necessarily apply to naturalism any more than to other genres.

I am indebted to Mr. R. L. Hall, a critic of both the drama and novel, for pointing out the only apparent difference between naturalism and realism. This, according to Mr. Hall, is the legitimatizing of "dirt" and "ugliness" on the grounds of "scientific investigation" of life. Of course, Mr. Hall is thinking of Zola's *Le Roman expérimental,* which insists that we turn to the "experimental and scientific spirit of the century" for our artistic inspiration. Mr. Hall feels that the working out of this theory has been merely a painting of "dirt" and "vulgarity" to the exclusion of other things. In earlier times Smollet, Fielding, and even Shakespeare were not above

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[6] Introduction to *The Propyläen,* translation by Andrew Mott.
[7] "On Poesy or Art," delivered in 1818.
[8] *Outline of Contemporary Drama,* p. 187.

including such elements in their art, but they were at least honest about it — the inclusion was a concession to our coarser sensibilities. And these writers preserved a balance which the naturalists do not usually preserve even though they claim to. A consideration of scientific truth undoubtedly strengthens realistic portrayal of life; but to place all one's emphasis upon the low, the bestial, and the psychopathic is no more "scientific truth" than emphasis on the sweetly pretty.

Beauty in naturalism.

Of course Hauptmann and the really big men are not without the saving grace of beauty. Even so gruesome a social portrait as Hauptmann's *The Weavers* contains it. A rather humorous incident arose through criticism following his production of *Before Sunrise.* Wolfgang Stammler [9] tells us that the play shows life in all its brutal nakedness — that character delineation, plot, and language are so constructed as to imitate nature. At the same time something other than ugliness is presented. A really charming love scene occurs in the last act. This impressed many contemporary naturalists as being "too pretty." Hauptmann apologized: "What can I do about it," he asked "if nature is *also* lovely?"

II — The Study of Naturalism.

Gerhart Hauptmann.

For a study of naturalism we can begin with Hauptmann. His work, in whatever genre it may be, is highly significant and influential. He did much to discourage

[9] *Deutsche Literatur von Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart,* pp. 26–7.

artificial drama that posed as real, and much to break down silly restrictions of the "theatre." For purposes of better understanding, we may divide his plays into two classes which can be termed "romantic" and "naturalistic." In the first class belong such pieces as *The Assumption of Hannele,* a dream play which might also come under the head of "fantasy." In the naturalistic class are dramas like *Rose Bernd* and *The Weavers. The Weavers* is Hauptmann's masterpiece and is a great and powerful handling of the capital-labor theme. You will notice that it contains no love story, and no sentimental reconciliation between the opposing forces; there are none of the qualities which make for popular appeal. Yet there is unity, movement, and considerably more genuine drama than in Galsworthy's handling of the same subject in *Strife.*

"Miss Julia." [10]

August Strindberg is sometimes associated with the school of expressionism, occasionally with the school of fantasy, but more often with the school of *naturalism.* He himself designates *Miss Julia* (1888) "a naturalistic tragedy." As part of his naturalism he throws over the idea of unified character motives and presents a theory of "personality": [11] "An event in real life — and this discovery is quite recent — springs generally from a whole series of more or less deep-lying motives, but of these the spectator chooses as a rule the one his reason can master most easily, or else the one reflecting most favourably on his power of reasoning. A suicide is committed. Bad business, says the merchant. Unrequited love, say the ladies.

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[10] *A Book of Dramas.*
[11] Author's Preface to *Miss Julia.*

Sickness, says the sick man. Crushed hopes, says the shipwrecked. But now it may be that the motive lay in all or none of these directions. It is possible that the one who is dead may have hid the main motive by pushing forward another meant to place his memory in a better light." This theory is correct psychologically; but its definite application to the stage is exceedingly difficult, because once you have broken the unified impression that various traits of a character make upon an audience, you have rendered a significant view of the whole almost impossible. In the case of *Miss Julia* Strindberg does succeed; but most of his imitators have failed.

Miss Julia is one of the first plays in which formalized dialogue, wherein the speeches of the characters flow one out of the other, is discarded. Here you get isolated comments prompted by the *thoughts* of the characters just as you get them in *The Cherry Orchard.* This type of writing is now generally accepted as a part of realism, and most of our modern playwrights, as a matter of course, employ it. You will not find some of the speeches very appetizing, but I can think of no better example of naturalism to give you than this particular play, especially in connection with the matter of dialogue.

Strindberg uses no act division in *Miss Julia.* Instead, he shows the passage of time by bringing in what he calls the "chorus" or "ballet." An hour is supposed to elapse during a five-minute ballet. How this works out in the actual production I cannot tell. I do know, however, that an act lasting one hour and thirty minutes without an intermission is too great a strain upon any Western audience.

Strindberg tells us that he believes in life-like qualities, not only in the writing of plays but in the acting and pro-

ducing of them. He also describes for us his ideal theatre: "If we might escape the visible orchestra, with its disturbing lamps and its faces turned toward the public; if we could have the seats on the main floor (the orchestra or the pit) raised so that the eyes of the spectators would be above the knees of the actors; if we could also have the auditorium completely darkened during the performance; and if, first and last, we could have a small stage and a small house: then a new dramatic art might rise, and the theatre might at least become an institution for the entertainment of people with culture."

These things exist today in all first-rate theatres; yet we can hardly say that they are the institutions of naturalism any more than of realism. When Strindberg was a babe in arms, Robertson, the English realist, was advocating just such improvements.

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3. American naturalism in the work of O'Neill and others.
4. Hauptmann's contribution to naturalism.
5. Naturalistic qualities in *Rose Bernd.*

Chapter X

SYMBOLISM

I — The Nature of Symbolism.

Symbolism is a term thoroughly legitimate, though perhaps one might say that any really good play is symbolic. I mean that if a play has the quality of "universal significance," the specific, concrete things it presents must be symbols of something greater behind them. Besides, any creative artist has a power of *imagery,* and his images really are symbols.

The interpretation of symbolism.

Where we as the audience often make a mistake is to treat symbolism as allegory. Particularly if we have literal minds, we cannot conceive of the symbol as interpreting a general idea or emotion. We want to pin it to something definite; the result is that we interpret one concrete thing as another concrete thing, and the process becomes a game in which no two people derive the same interpretations. This, of course, is a little hard on the dramatist; for it means that we have written his play for him and given it an emphasis he never intended. I have heard lecturers and preachers derive from works of art symbolic interpretations that would have amazed the artists themselves. Of course, certain people ask, "What difference does that make? Let each man get the meaning which fits *him.*" That might do for an artist who hadn't

much to say. But a man who has had a genuine inspiration and given it in a clear and beautiful way doesn't want it misinterpreted to fit the peculiar requirements of someone else.[1]

A symbolical interpretation of any kind, however, is often better than the *psychological* one popular in modern criticism. Too many of our prevailing art critiques sound like dissertations in medical journals. Connected with Ibsen's *Ghosts* is a typical example. In this play Oswald, inheriting his father's disease, knows that he is going insane. He gives his mother some tablets and begs her to administer them when the dark hour shall have come. The last scene finds him in the early morning sitting in a chair. The maid draws back the window curtains and a vivid sunlight floods upon him. His mother enters. The following is a scientific interpretation quoted by Weigand:

"It has been suggested that in all probability Oswald suffers a right-sided stroke, as, sitting with his back to the window, he seems to crumple in his chair. He is still sufficiently conscious to realize what is happening to him. He knows that the dreaded moment has arrived; so he attemps to say 'Mother, give me the tablets.' But the speech centres of his brain have been affected by the stroke, and unable to find the right word, he keeps repeating, 'the sun — the sun,' meaning all the time, the tablets. This theory, according to which Oswald merely suffers a stroke

[1] "The worst picture can appeal to our senses and imagination by arousing their activity, setting them free, and leaving them to themselves; the best work of art also appeals to our senses, but in a higher language which, of course, we must understand; it enchains the feelings and imagination; it deprives us of caprice, we cannot deal with a perfect work at our will; we are forced to give ourselves up to it, in order to receive ourselves from it again, exalted and refined. . . ." Goethe, *Introduction to The Propyläen.*

accompanied by paraphasia, instead of lapsing at once into complete idiocy, seems to be supported by medical experience in analogous cases. But I cannot believe that Ibsen could have had such a thing in mind in writing these words. Even if he had been aware that Oswald's collapse warranted such a construction, which I doubt, Ibsen must have realized the utter impossibility of conveying it to the general reader, or to any lay audience." [2]

The last is a sensible comment. I can picture an audience composed of doctors, psychologists, and medical students murmuring at the propitious moment, "Paraphasia — not complete idiocy" — "Brain centres" — "He means the tablets." Perhaps they would get a "kick" out of it; but Ibsen was not writing for them. The effect he wanted to produce was artistic, not scientific. He knew that any sort of efficient staging would reveal the shafts of light falling upon the stricken youth and would suggest a symbolic connotation. That sudden warm golden light penetrating the gloom of the room could stand for nothing but what the sun itself stands for — *life*. And, therefore, Oswald's request for the *sun* is true dramatic symbolism.

Sometimes confusion in the interpretation of symbols is the fault of the dramatist. No dramatist has a right to ask us to interpret his symbols unless they are reasonably clear. Often young authors tell us we should read all sorts of strange meanings into their plays, which only they or their friends would be able to detect. Even established playwrights occasionally make this mistake. O'Neill in his "Great God Brown" should not have asked us to detect from the hero's name, "Dion Anthony," the fact that

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[2] *The Modern Ibsen*, p. 94.

he meant a combination of "Dionyseus" and "St. Anthony," and therefore a combination of Pagan and Christian.[3] There are some things that even an intelligent and imaginative audience are incapable of doing.

The symbolism of Maeterlinck.

I can find no greater victim of incorrect symbolical interpretation than Maeterlinck. Symbols abound in his work; but we should not be too concrete in rendering them. We should get these symbols in the *abstract*. They then give us a "feeling" which, if we are sympathetic and sensitive, grows more and more definite. We cannot explain it in literal terms, but we can feel it. I am indebted for this use of the word "abstract" to Mr. Clayton Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton says that "since truth is abstract why not tell the truth abstractly." [4] He speaks of Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagiles* as being a delineation of the abstract emotion of *fear*. The children do not know what they are afraid of. They only know *fear*.

Perhaps a passage from Maeterlinck himself might explain. "Great poetry, if one observes it closely, contains within itself three principal elements: in the first place, verbal beauty; secondly, the contemplation and the passionate depiction of that which actually exists around us and within us—that is to say, nature and our emotions —; and finally, overshadowing the whole work and creating its own individualistic atmosphere, the idea which the poet conceives of the unknown, in which float about the beings

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[3] O'Neill may have got this from Ibsen's "Emperor and Galilean" which deals with the same idea — or from Nietzsche's theory of tragedy which is based on the combination of "Dionysian and Apollonian" or "Drunkenness and Dreamland."

[4] *Conversations on Contemporary Drama,* pp. 169–170.

and things which he calls forth, the mystery which engulfs them, judges them, and controls their destinies. There is no doubt in my mind that this last element is the most significant. Take at random any beautiful poem, be it ever so short or fleeting. One rarely finds that its beauty, its grandeur confine themselves to those facts familiar to our world." [5] It will be readily seen that no mere literal presentation of dialogue and action can give the effect of this last element. The dramatist has to find the *soul* word,[6] or else a juxtaposition of words that create an image or feeling which those same words in any other juxtaposition would not create. Here, perhaps, in this latter method one finds the secret of Maeterlinck. His repetitions and precise arrangement of simple words produce a second world — a world beyond the concrete wherein dwell the *souls* of his characters.

II — The Study of Symbolism.

Maeterlinck.

Maeterlinck is, of course, the dramatist to read for symbolism. Note the opening scene of *Pélléas and Mélisande.* Don't try to interpret each line by itself, but say the words out loud. Get the "feeling" as well as the literal meaning of them.

"Open the gate! Open the gate!". . . "Who is there?". . . "Go out by the little gates; there are enough of them!". . . "Wait! I do not know whether I shall be able to open it;

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[5] Works, Preface to Vol. I, Section VII, *Théâtre.*

[6] Joseph Conrad says: "The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. . . . It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective." From the Preface to "A Personal Record."

. . . it is never opened.". . . "Oh! how the bolts and the locks grate!". . . "Oh, how light it is already out-of-doors!". . . "The sun is rising on the sea!". . . "It is open . . . It is wide open!"

Does that not give you a sense of the desire for light, freedom, understanding — the pushing away of shrouding obstacles? Yet that scene was scoffed at by many who saw the Jane Cowl production. People said it meant nothing. I suppose that if it had presented a group of railroad men and bums at a "crossing" and the lines had read something like this: "Open them gates! Open up, I tell yer!". . . "Keep yer shirt on! They ain't never opened". . . "Gee! what a lousy lock!". . . "Oo — o! Lookit that sun! Ain't it purty!" the effect would have been pronounced both "profound" and "beautiful."

The second scene of *Pélléas and Mélisande* follows the idea and the mood of the first. Don't make the mistake of asking where literally Mélisande came from or why she was lost. If you do, you will find yourself, like Golaud, at the end: "I do not know . . . I am lost too." Follow each scene throughout the play with a uniform attitude. You will discover that tremendous power comes from it. The tone never varies; it only grows in intensity. No amount of concrete or rational portrayal could give you the impression this does. When you come to the end where Mélisande dies in giving birth to her child, and the old king sums it all up,[7] "'T was a little being, so quiet, so fearful, and so silent . . . 'T was a poor little mysterious being, like everybody . . . She lies there as if she were the big sister of her child . . . Come, come . . . My God!

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[7] The very old characters in Maeterlinck are always the author's spokesmen.

. . . I shall never understand it at all . . . Let us not stay here. — Come; the child must not stay in this room . . . She must live now in her place . . . It is the poor little one's turn . . ." you realize that you have witnessed a tragedy of abstract emotion, told in symbols dramatically accumulative in their effect, and leaving you, as all tragedies should, with a vision of universal humanity.

"The Intruder."[8]

This is a shorter play by Maeterlinck and perhaps one simpler for the study of symbolism. Here the abstract idea is *death*. Death does not appear except in symbol; but its *presence* is suggested in the very opening lines. The old blind grandfather, not being diverted by external vision, feels the approach of the grim visitor before any of the others — the rustle of leaves on the porch, the flicker of the lamp. As the conviction of what is occurring forces itself upon the audience, their emotional concept increases. Without realizing what is happening to them, they find themselves swept into a consciousness of the very essence of death. No dramatic method other than the peculiar symbolism of Maeterlinck can produce such an effect.

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6. The symbolism of *Pélléas and Mélisande.*
7. Maeterlinck's symbols of *fear.*

Chapter XI

EXPRESSIONISM

I — The Nature of Expressionism.

I think that I shall begin with another passage from Mr. Hamilton:

> Within the last year or two, I have read in several reviews of the current theatre a word that I do not understand — the word "expressionism." Since all art is a form of expression, I cannot understand how any one particular method of art can be any more expressionistic than any other method. I have never used the term "expressionism" in my writing or my conversation, because I do not know the meaning of it; and I have never found anybody else who knows what it means. Yet the word is frequently employed by various professional writers, who don't know what they mean by it. Apparently they use it because it sounds impressive.[1]

I fear I am somewhat in the position of Mr. Hamilton. I should like to know something about expressionism, and I have tried to find out something. But unfortunately, only the expressionists themselves seem to know, and they do not always agree with one another. Perhaps one or two conversations I have had on the subject have helped me to a nearer understanding of it than anything I have read in books.

I once went to a German professor who had acquired his scholarship in Berlin, the principal seat of expressionism.

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[1] *Conversations on Contemporary Drama,* pp. 151–152.

"What is expressionism?" I asked.

His reply was: "Expressionism is intellectual vomitting." I admit I was a bit startled, but as he went on I gathered that expressionism, unlike "impressionism" which gets its inspiration from without, disgorges those things that apparently are too rich for its system to bear. In other words, as F. M. Perry says, expressionism is the application of the Aristotelian purgation theory for the benefit of the artist rather than the audience.

I probably misunderstood my informant at some points; but at least this was a beginning.

I next questioned Dr. George Parker, a prominent psychologist, whom I met on shipboard as he was journeying to Dr. Freud and an international conference. Dr. Parker *says* that drama is only his hobby, but he knows more about it than many people who pretend to it as a profession. When I put my query he answered with what at first appeared to be irrelevance:

"I don't want you to think I haven't any respect for Sherwood Anderson and that crowd. They've put their fingers on something pretty solid. And Anderson, at least, has a sense of beauty."

Dr. Parker then explained that the expressionists feel civilization to be all wrong. The only way to right matters is to return to fundamentals and start over again.

"Doesn't that imply considerable waste?" I asked. "It must involve throwing out the good things man has created as well as the bad."

"It does," said Dr. Parker. "But it gives the expressionist a clear field to deal with such elemental matters as *force, mass,* and *primitive color.*"

I recalled that interesting book by William Somerset

Maugham entitled *The Moon and Sixpence.* Its hero, modelled after Gauguin, overthrows existing laws of art and paints huge masses of vivid-colored and tremendously forceful natural forms — or rather natural formlessness; fruits before they become fruits, beasts in embryo, trees that are neither leaves, nor bark, nor branches but only the *essence* of trees. It had reminded me of that other, older book which runs, "And in the beginning the earth was void and without form.". . . "Must we go back and do it all over again?" I thought. "We've no assurance that it won't turn out the same."

The matter of getting back to fundamentals might be illustrated by a reference to O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape.* O'Neill says himself [2] that the character of Yank "has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal, and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the 'woist punches from bot' of 'em.' " While O'Neill's hero does not get all the way back, he emphasizes the desire that Dr. Parker regards as the main impulse of expressionism.

The algebraic symbol, "stylicized" art.

Ludwig Lewisohn, reviewing Rice's *The Adding Machine,*[3] says that expressionism has two aims. One is to "fling the inner life of the dramatic figures immediately upon the stage." The second is to "synthesize, instead of describing, their world and their universe into symbolic visions that shall sum up whole histories, moralities, cos-

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[2] *The New York Herald-Tribune,* November 16, 1924.
[3] *The Nation,* April 4, 1923.

mogonies in a brief minute and a fleeting scene." The first aim was less elegantly, but perhaps as lucidly described by my German professor. The second refers to a kind of symbolism distinguished from Maeterlinck's by the term "algebraic." Perhaps "stylicized" is more explanatory. "Stylicized" is a word now used in connection with expressionism and it means formalized. It is employed in place of formalized because the latter might be confused with classical form. "Stylicized" has here the same application it would have to early Christian or Byzantine painting, where subjects were not lifelike but *expressed* an *attitude* toward life.

I am not sure that this all works out in the expressionistic plays I have seen; unfortunately many of the new "isms" are more persuasive in theory than in practice. For instance, the symbol must be expressed in a known medium. Unless an author presents his material in some form that the audience are likely to recognize, he will not succeed in reaching them at all. Dialogue and action, being the mediums by which a play is presented, must be handled according to some accepted system of exchange. Suppose you buy ninety-eight cents worth of groceries and give the grocer a dollar bill. He gives you one cent change and you object. He tells you that according to his vision, perhaps he will call it his "divine" or "artistic" inspiration, a dollar bill is worth only ninety-nine cents. And perhaps in the ultimate judgment of things he is right; some one like Einstein might discover that after all a dollar *is* worth only ninety-nine cents. But until then will you accept the grocer's interpretation? No! You know that a dollar bill is accepted generally as the equivalent of one hundred cents. It is the recognized medium

of exchange, and until a general understanding to the contrary has been reached, you will demand your two cents.

F. M. Perry [4] says that the chief weakness of expressionism is violence: "The extremists in their campaign of disruption and inversion attack whatever is sacrosanct; they advocate whatever is different, not that it is in itself necessarily better, but that custom, habit, is paralyzing, tending towards stagnation, petrification, death, and must be ruthlessly demolished. In the resulting topsy-turvydom our honored faculties are debased, our vices sublimated into virtues. Among the image-breakers is a particular class that specializes in rebellion against the tyranny of art canons, traditions, principles, forms, and cultivated taste; that must abolish old verse forms, dramatic conventions, unity, logical connection, consecutiveness. . . ."

This is very sane criticism. Violence must be eliminated from *any* form of art if that form is to survive. We tire of nothing sooner than that which is extreme, unbalanced, and unrestrained.

Constructivism; the doctrine of Meierhold (sic.).

I have not space to take up the many new isms here, but by considering one I may be able to give you an impression of what some of them are like. Here is a passage from an article on "Meierholdism," recently so popular in Russia. It reads like a dissertation on Euclid.

> So long as the basic structural elements of an architectural form are used on the stage the innate physical reality of the form can be transmitted to the audience. All of our architectural entities, houses, chairs, walls, streets are constantly changing, adhering as forms only to their basal usefulness. The structural

[4] "Story Writing," p. 183.

bases allowing use are more complete primal realities than completely indicated forms which cannot function. From this conviction grew the form we commonly accept as constructivism. Inutility having limited the solid reality of which a stage is capable, Meierhold refused his theatre to whatever could not bear the acid test of use. Decorative beauty went and architectural beauty came simultaneously. In the composition of juxtaposed structural forms, the theatre grew into space, into greater contrast, into fullness, into a contrapuntal reality, which life contains but of which limited human perceptions cannot avail itself.[5]

Now I admit that I am impressed by this. And how wonderful it would be if it worked! But as I read the description of how the theory is carried out, I wonder if the result is not chaos and sensation. I am told that men drowned in eight inches of water. Theoretically this harmonizes with a later statement, "nothing was realistic, everything had complete reality." But as I consider the difficulties of conveying the idea of drowning under such circumstances, I wonder how a ludicrous effect could be avoided. In the few accounts of Meierholdism I have been able to get, I have noticed that the greatest emphasis is placed on physicalities, and, always physicalities of the most improbable sort.

Another article appearing two years earlier[6] gives the following description:

Since everything shown upon the stage should influence and work sympathetically upon the spectator, so the tempo of the

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[5] *"Meierhold" at Work,* by Herbert J. Biberman, *Theatre Guild Magazine,* January, 1929. It will be noted that in the articles from which I quote, the spelling of the founder's name varies as much as his methods seem to.

[6] *The Miracle of "Maierhold,"* as described by B. Tschemerinsky of the Habima to Ella Barnett. *The New York Times,* January 23, 1927.

play itself must be in keeping with our age, with our life. Today actors upon the stage cannot walk, stand and sit as in the old days, when life went along normally and slowly. Nowadays the actor must run, jump, fly, because life runs, the age jumps, epochs fly.

That accounts for "Maierhold's" so-called theatrical "tricks." At the moment an actor is to sit down, a chair is shot up through the floor, beds actually fly, walls run, and, in city scenes, real automobiles and motorcycles run down the aisles, up over the orchestra rail and then among the populace upon the stage.

A lovely theory, yet why should such extreme methods of presentation be any more true to "reality" than simple ones? I have passed most of my life in "jazzy" New York City, as did my parents and grandparents before me, and I live in the heart of Greenwich Village, one of the jazziest parts of that city. Street cars, subways, elevateds, automobiles, and airplanes rush by. After sundown sightseers flock to the night clubs, and boys and girls from the great open spaces busily grow sick on synthetic gin. But the "reality" of life — life in the myriad homes about me — remains pretty much the same. It still may be represented by people sitting on stationary chairs and eating from wingless tables. And even on the streets, during the normal hours of the day, it reveals itself in men plodding about their business, women strolling with baby carriages, grocers selling potatoes, and children trudging to school.[7] I have never been to Soviet Russia, but unless human nature has grown nonhuman there, the "reality" of life must be capable of interpretation.

Mr. Joseph Wood Krutch,[8] who visited Moscow in 1928,

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[7] "And everywhere I stepped there was a baby or a cat." From Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem *Macdougal Street* (Greenwich Village).

[8] *Moscow in 1928,* from the *Theatre Guild Magazine,* October, 1928.

assures us that the Russian theatre was never so completely given over to "constructivism and similar eccentricities" as we have been led to believe. In fact, he says that Commissar Lunocharsky believes that the classics will "come back." "The most popular plays are now those with a very definite content expressible in words rather than those which depend for their effect upon startling mechanical innovations."

Mr. St. John Ervine[9], commenting on an article by Louis Lozowick entitled *The Theatre of "Meyerhold,"* quotes the following:

"It (Verhaeren's *The Dawn*) was thoroughly revamped to suit the needs of the moment. The settings were done in a semi-cubistic manner. There was an attempt to bring the stage and the audience into close communion. Actual sailors came onto the stage, mingling with the actors, and a military orchestra joined the theatrical orchestra. The climax of the performance was reached when an actual telegram from the field of battle was read announcing Smilga's victory over Gen. Wrangel."

"That stuff dazes me," says Mr. Ervine, "but Mr. Lozowick evidently imagines that the introduction of actual sailors on the stage so that they might mingle with the actors, who, I hope, were actual too, signified something and raised the tone of the drama. I envy Mr. Lozowick his ability to be elated by such 'improvements' as these. This production apparently created a storm among the critics, and I find myself wondering what poor Verhaeren, a gentle Flemish poet who seemed to me when I met him to be the saddest figure of the whole war, would have thought had he lived to see what the exuberant and, I fear, partially demented Meyerhold was doing with *The Dawn*."

[9] *The New York World,* March 17, 1929.

What Mr. Ervine then adds is so delightful that I allow myself the luxury of still further quotation: " 'Meyerhold' introduced 'constructivism' in stage settings and 'biomechanism' into acting:

'Constructivism was simply to be the theatrical parallel to industrial technique demanding the exclusion of all useless decoration and the precise functional organization of the stage. Biomechanism was the study of the physiologic and psychologic laws that govern the actor's body as a normally functioning mechanism so that its every gesture and movement might be utilized with the greatest efficiency.' "

"How these revolutionary lads love abstract polysyllables! Will any one assert that this pretentious flapdoodle means anything?"

I think that in the whole matter of new schools one may safely adopt a cosmopolitan attitude. Be ready to *consider* a new thing if it is presented by a man who obviously knows his business, but not to *accept* it until it has been tried thoroughly and found to have solid worth.

II — The Study of Expressionism.

German expressionism.

You might look into such a play as Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight.* When I saw this in 1922 at the Theatre Guild, I had no idea it was *expressionistic.* I took it for realism and liked it as such. It contains soliloquies in which the characters tell us their thoughts much as in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude;* but I had known that kind of thing in the melodramas of my childhood. People *express* themselves in *From Morn to Midnight* exactly as

Clayton Hamilton says they do in all drama. The play is good and is written sincerely.

American expressionism.

If we except a play Arthur Hopkins produced many years ago, called *The Poor Little Rich Girl,* by Eleanor Gates, the first piece of American expressionism we have is Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine.* I do not think highly of this because it seems to me forced. There is small delicacy shown in handling the bedroom scene, and the next one, symbolizing the mechanical life in a business office, is too obvious for anything but farce. Subtlety is not the average expressionist's chief virtue. His points are either blunt and crude, or too vague to be understood. He hasn't learned the art of being simultaneously clear and delicate. The last act of *The Adding Machine* is what, I presume, purports to be fantasy; but to me it lacks both beauty and inspiration. In 1929 two other expressionistic plays of Rice were produced in New York. One, *Subway,* was poor and had a bad start in amateur circles. The other, *Street Scene* [10] is a masterpiece.

Street Scene.

As with Kaiser's plays, I do not see how this differs vastly from naturalism or good realism. It presents everyday people in the lower middle stratum, such people as one might find in any unprepossessing side street. Close investigation shows it to be far from photographic. The dramatic effects are as carefully selected and " played up" as those in a completely classical piece. For instance, Mr. Rice was confronted with the problem of projecting

[10] Pulitzer Prize Play, 1929.

several families before his audience. He placed them all in an apartment house, and made the weather very warm so that their lives would be enacted in the open windows and on the "stoop" and sidewalk. Also, since he needed to portray some of them undergoing violent emotions, the humid atmosphere would tend to a relaxation of self-control. While he wanted everything to be natural, he didn't want the interruption of vehicles passing; so the scene showed only a foot or two beyond the curb and at one side of the stage was a sign reading "Street Closed." In order to avoid children on the scene (except when he needed them for dramatic purposes) he fixed the season of the play just before school closes in June, a time late enough to coincide with the heat wave.

At the very beginning he created his *heat atmosphere.* People entered thinly clad and dragging themselves along, wiping the perspiration from their faces and expressing all the usual bromides about "humidity," and so forth. This, you may say, is photographic; but if Mr. Rice had been photographic, he would have had to continue the heat atmosphere throughout the play, which would have retarded the action and been unbearably monotonous. He used a simple device to get around this problem. He knew that if the audience received a strong enough impression at the start, they would unconsciously carry this impression in their imaginations, even though he gradually stopped talking about the heat. I doubt if any one who did not think of the matter afterward was aware of this "trick." Such artifice is, of course, the *art that conceals art,* and it belongs to no one school. Whether *Street Scene* really is expressionism I do not know; but I do know that it is an unusually inspired piece of work.

Howard Lawson. This author's *Processional* received the support of the Theatre Guild a few years ago and attracted considerable attention; it then died and has hardly been mentioned since. It seemed to me a good idea but half written. A somewhat better piece by Lawson, *Pinwheel,* was produced later at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Like most of its kind it dealt with the effect of a mechanical and jazz age upon the white-collar class. It proved clearly that no idea can stand too frequent interpretation, especially when the story is itself hackneyed.

Machinal.[11] This play is an excellent example of serious expressionism and is nearer to the type than *Street Scene.* It does not give a realistic portrayal of life, but rather a *stylicized symbol* of life. The beginning and end are not prepossessing, but the central portion is both convincing and artistic.

"Beggar on Horseback."[12]

I am inclined to think that up to now the best representation of expressionism in this country has been in the field of *burlesque.* Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar on Horseback* represents not so much what *does* happen in life as what *would* happen if people followed certain deep impulses. This play is also stylicized or algebraic symbolism. Perhaps Kaufman and Connelly do not think of their work as expressionistic; but it is as near the genre as one could find. To call it a "satirical-fantasy" or a "fantastic-satire" would be but to coin another hyphenated word that would not really be descriptive.

The body of the play is a dream, and like most dreams

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[11] By Sophie Treadwell, produced in New York, 1928.
[12] *A Book of Dramas.*

is an illogical composite of memories running in the mind of the dreamer. This makes the "unreal" quality possible, and the stylicized manner is harmonious. An example of this last point may be found in the scene at Mr. Cady's offices where Neil is sent from one department to another making out requisitions for a lead pencil. It is, of course, an exaggerated reproduction of any business office, but it is also the symbol of an office that has fallen under the plague of "efficiency."

A highly artistic touch in the play, thoroughly dramatic because in strong contrast to the satirized material portions, is an exquisite romantic motif in the form of a musical pantomime. This pantomime, *A Kiss in Xanadu,* is interpolated in the middle of the play and emphasizes the love scenes between Neil and Cynthia. The love scenes represent constructive and creative elements, while the satirized portions represent destructive or sterile ones. The music to *A Kiss in Xanadu* was composed by Deems Taylor, and the part of the Crown Princess was played by Grethe Ruzt-Nissen,[13] whose delicate and lovely personality first attracted attention when she came to America with the Swedish Ballet. The introduction of romantic elements in *Beggar on Horseback* gives the play a gem-like lustre and produces the same effect we get in the best high comedies — a combination of *beauty* and *wit.*

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[13] Greta Nissen since "going movie."

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1. German expressionism in the work of Kaiser.
2. The *color* of expressionism as seen in *The World We Live In.*
3. The mixture of expressionism and realism in *Liliom.*
4. American expressionism.
5. *Street Scene* — expressionism, naturalism, or realism.
6. Expressionism and burlesque — *Beggar on Horseback.*

Chapter XII

THE LITTLE THEATRE

Dual purpose.

"The Little Theatre" has two purposes. The first is to introduce drama into colleges and local communities where there is no other way of getting productions. The second is to introduce *new things* into the theatre.

Introducing Drama into Local Communities.

The study of drama in classrooms is a fundamental necessity for cultural understanding of the genre; but actual *production* of plays is a tremendous stimulus. I am not considering here the practical value to students preparing to be actors, producers, playwrights, and scenic or costume designers. That is all included in a well equipped and well managed educational producing department. I am considering the effect upon the audience who, in this case, are the students and their families or friends. In localities where the college theatre is the only one in existence this production need is great. I said in my first chapter that a play ought to be "presented," and while students can be taught to read plays, productions will assist in the understanding of other plays not presented.

Road and stock companies.

In regard to Little Theatre movements not connected with educational institutions there is pretty much the same

need. Today the cost of professional road productions is so high, and the competition of radios, moving pictures, and other forms of entertainment is so keen, that success is almost impossible.[1, 2]

Local stock companies fill to a limited extent the place of travelling companies; but their productions are often inadequately cast and rehearsed. The average big professional production rehearses five weeks, and during that time the actors are not doing anything else. A stock company rehearses one week, and at the same time gives six evening performances and several matinees of a different play. I once belonged to a stock company in which two new plays were given every week. I had but three days to learn and rehearse each part and had to act in ten performances a week and attend two social functions for advertising purposes. The theatre and the hotel were under the same roof, and sometimes for a fortnight I did not set foot out of doors. Under such conditions it is impossible to have good productions.

I mention these conditions to show that away from a metropolis nothing can take the place of the Little Theatre.

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[1] A place like New York has a sufficiently large number of drama-trained populace (I am not speaking now of the typical "Broadway" audience) to support good drama; but even there it is necessary to charge more money for seats than people in most other places are willing to pay. A person in the average American city or small town simply will not adopt as a general practice the payment of $3.85 to $4.40 a seat for anything but grand opera. Successful reviews and musical shows in New York average $6.60, and sometimes run as high as $11. A New York drama lover in moderate circumstances either goes to the theatre seldom or sits in the rear of the gallery, a place where people of similar financial status in a small community will not sit.

[2] In 1926 during a period of three weeks at the height of the season only one professional dramatic production was offered in Harrisburg (the capital of Pennsylvania).

Introducing New Things into the Theatre.

The best way to estimate the value of this purpose is to see what the Little Theatre has actually accomplished. I shall not recommend *plays* of the Little Theatre for study. Those that are good sooner or later get into professional theatres, and those that are ineffectual need not be studied. Histories of the Little Theatre may be found in the bibliography at the end of this chapter, but it may help the student to have summed up for him the leading events of the movement.

France.

The first experimental or *little* theatre was instituted by Antoine in Paris in 1877, and was called the "Théâtre Libre." Antoine was a clerk in the Paris Gas Company. He was displeased with the restrictions of contemporary professional theatres and got together a little company of amateurs who presented as their first performance four original one-act plays. Only one play was effective, and this was later done in a big theatre. Antoine persisted and eventually met with success. His venture broke the tyrrany of conventional French drama.

Germany.

Max Reinhardt established a Little Theatre in Germany, the first production of which was in a Berlin restaurant. Then at Kleine's Theatre he and others produced one-act plays by Strindberg, Wilde, and Wedekind. Later they experimented with Ibsen, Shaw, Wolf, Maeterlinck, Goethe, and Stücken. The "Tribuna" encouraged men like Hauptmann; and Ibsen, while he was in Germany, influenced it considerably.

C. **Russia.**

In 1890 Constantine Stanislavski established the Moscow Art Theatre, at first composed of amateurs but later growing very highly professional.

Poland.

Wyspiansky, the Polish painter and poet, operated a theatre at Cracaw. He produced native plays, and designed and painted highly effective symbolic scenery.

D. **England.**

In the early nineties a Dutchman named Grine, who was a dramatic critic in London, introduced into England some foreign plays already known abroad. In 1899 came the "English Stage Society" which not only experimented but established a permanent repertoire theatre. This society brought George Bernard Shaw into the drama with such plays as *You never Can Tell* and *Candida*. Foreign pieces by Hauptmann, Ibsen, Gorky, and Brieux were also done.

In 1904 the "Court Theatre" was formed under Granville-Barker and a man named Lee. Prominent among the productions were the Gilbert Murray translations of Greek dramas.

E. **Ireland.**

The "Irish Literary Theatre" came in 1899 and evolved into the "Irish National Theatre" in 1902. This organization founded in 1904 the "Abbey Theatre," under a Miss Horniman who contributed a building which had previously been a morgue. When Miss Horniman left for the "Gaiety Theatre" in Manchester, William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory remained in charge.

America.

The Abbey Theatre was responsible for the success of experimental theatres in the United States. "The Irish Players" came to this country in 1912. I suppose that date is as good as any to mark the termination of our old drama and the beginning of our new. The new started with a fight. The Irish Players included in their repertoire John Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World.* Misconstrued as an insult to the Irish people, it had already caused riots in Dublin and London theatres. The Irish population in New York took up the cause and attracted the attention of the general public. Interest soon shifted from the political situation to the artistic, and people discovered that here was a completely new drama, more natural and sincere than any they had been accustomed to.[3]

This incident encouraged the establishment of American Little Theatres. Winthrop Ames opened one in New York, Maurice Brown one in Chicago, and Mrs. Lyman Gale one in Boston. In 1915 the Washington Square Players of New York began. After their first performance they took over the Bandbox Theatre and later went into the Comedy. They were only partially successful until Edward Massey's "Plot and Playwrights," written for "English 47" at Harvard, put them on their feet. They disbanded in 1918 because of the war, though in a way the present Theatre Guild might be considered an outgrowth of them. Meanwhile, the Punch and Judy Theatre was opened in New York and the Princess tried out a series of Grand Guignol "horrifiers."

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[3] Save for two or three productions of Shaw and an Ibsen flare almost none of the newer drama had at this time got into America.

Cincinnati and other cities took up the scheme, and by 1917 over fifty Little Theatres had been inaugurated throughout the country. At present there are more in the United States than anywhere else in the world.

A recent movement of the Little Theatre is the "Little Theatre Tournament," to which David Belasco offers a cup. Its yearly entries have occasioned considerable interest and friendly rivalry. The Little Theatre of Dallas has twice won the trophy and seems to have one of the strongest organizations in the country. It has attracted the attention of such people as Rachmaninoff, Olga Petrova, Hugh Walpole, Paderewsky, and Heifetz.

At Pasadena there is a powerful Little Theatre organization. Eugene O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughs* was done there for five weeks before several thousand people. The average Little Theatre, of course, cannot conduct things on so extensive a basis as this; but the sum total of the movement in America unquestionably is significant.

It is also significant that whatever has proved genuinely artistic in them has been adopted by commercial theatres. Whether this means that they will continue to function as innovators, or whether the professional theatres will grow flexible enough to introduce innovations direct, cannot be foretold.

But in colleges and communities where fine professional productions are not available, the Little Theatre as a general art educator will undoubtedly continue to flourish.

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Chapter XIII

STAGE CENSORSHIP, ETHICS, AND MORALS

I once gave an interview on this subject to a reporter from a New York newspaper. Just before the paper went to press our city experienced the unusual thrill of an earthquake. Consequently, such material as I had given was curtailed, and I found two of my paragraphs wedged into an interview with the more famous and more formidable Dr. Sumner. Since what I said in no way agreed with what Dr. Sumner said, the concerted account sounded slightly fishy. Now I recognize that in this book I have the field to myself, but I also recognize that nothing in the world is more capable of misinterpretation than theories on censorship, ethics, and morals. In case an *argumentum ad hominem* should be used against me, may I state that I am *not* an atheist, an agnostic, a Bolshevic, a socialist, a pro-European, an anti-American, a divorceé, or an advocate of free love. I am, I hope, human enough to recognize the fact that in this imperfect world not all is "sweetness and light," and I don't like plays that pretend it is. On the other hand, I think the current tendency to lay so much stress on ugly phases of life gives as false a view as the sentimental one which assumes superhuman virtue. There is room in our drama for a little unpleasant truth, provided it is not presented either morbidly or sensationally, and there is room for very much more beauty than we have.

A long time ago George Moore said that the heritage of

Elizabethan literature had been vitiated to make it safe for the daughters of the "Villa." This tendency is in vogue today. When our reformers state grandly that the theatre must not corrupt the morals of the young, they imply that the young are the only ones to be considered. After all, because a parent has not enough strength to keep an immature child from what would injure it, there is no reason for society to be deprived of a full and vitalized drama.

Anglo-Saxons and morality.

Anglon-Saxons are the most rabid race on the subject of morality, not because they are more moral than other races, but because they are constantly confusing morals and art. A drama which can stand the highest test of art never has to worry about its morals. Censorship should be exercised only by a sensitive, thoroughly trained art critic.[1]

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[1] Joseph Conrad has the following to say about the official censor of plays in England: "This Chinese monstrosity, disguised in the trousers of the Western Barbarian and provided by the State with the immortal Mr. Stiggin's plug hat and umbrella, is with us. It is an office. An office of trust. And from time to time there is found an official to fill it. He is a public man. The least prominent of public men, the most unobstrusive, the most obscure if not the most modest.

"But however obscure, a public man may be told the truth if only once in his life. His office flourishes in the shade; not in the rustic shade beloved of the violet but in the muddled twilight of mind where tyranny of every sort flourishes. Its holder need not have either brain or heart, no sight, no taste, no imagination, not even bowels of compassion. He needs not these things. He has power. He can kill thought, and incidentally truth, and incidentally beauty, providing they seek to live in a dramatic form. He can do it, without seeing, without understanding, without feeling anything; out of mere stupid suspicion, as an irresponsible Roman Caesar could kill a senator. He can do that and there is no one to say him nay. He may call his cook (Molière used to do that) from below and give her five acts to judge every morning as a matter of constant practice and still remain the unquestioned destroyer of men's honest work. He may have a glass too much. This accident has happened to persons of unimpeachable morality — to gentlemen.

Latin countries acknowledge this and have a sounder art accordingly. I should like to cite an example:

A few years ago a Frenchman wrote a novel about a young girl — high bred, delicate, and pure. She discovers on the eve of her wedding that her husband-elect has trod the proverbial primrose path. The news, coming to so sensitive a nature, is unbalancing. She breaks off the engagement; then, despairingly begins intense and diverse dissipation. The major portion of the book is concerned with descriptions of her numerous vices. In the end she realizes their futility, reforms, marries, rears a family of children, and lives the life of a highly respected, valuable citizen.

The French censored that book, and its author was formally reprimanded. The United States, after deliberation, decided to accept it. The point of my example lies in the different reasons given by the two races for their decisions. The French said they did not object to the vivid descriptions. If a person could act like that girl, the matter had a place in literature. But they did object to the sentimentalized ending. They pointed out that neither biologically nor in any other way could a woman who had gone so far on the road of error and dissipation "come back" — at least to the extent of producing healthy, sound children. The book was immoral because untruthful. Therefore, any young girl reading it, would be erroneously informed about life, would say, "Well, *she* got away with it. Maybe *I* can."

He may suffer from spells of imbecility like Clodius. He may . . . what might he not do! I tell you he is the Caesar of the dramatic world. There has been since the Roman Principate nothing in the way of irresponsible power to compare with the office of the Censor of Plays." *Notes on Life and Letters,* pp. 78–79.

In this country we gave another explanation. It is unfortunate, we said, that a girl should be so foolish and sinful: the description of her debaucheries is terrible — but after all, since she reformed and became a good woman, the book teaches a lesson.

Now apply the *artistic* test. The novel purports to be realism, an interpretation of life. Yet as the French proved, it is false to life. It is therefore false to art. A keen art critic would spot this in a minute, and if he were a censor, would turn the book down. The point of its morals would not even have to be considered.

A few seasons ago I was asked for purposes of censorship to attend a tryout performance a few miles from New York. An unsavory advance comment on the morals of the piece resulted in people flocking to the theatre where they stood up five rows deep and leaned from the boxes and balconies till the place resembled an over-packed excursion boat. The manuscript of the play had already been censored. The mayor had read it, a committee of prominent citizens had read it, and a representative of the Girls' Friendly Society had read it. They had deleted a number of obviously obscene lines but had neglected others which they were not sophisticated enough to detect. I doubt, however, if many of them knew good drama from bad. The play was one of the cheapest, most blatantly sensational affairs I have ever seen, glossed over with sentimentality and giving what purported to be a virtuous, happy ending. When I made my report I stated this fact and made no mention of immorality. By telling what was no more than the truth — that the play was poor — I caused some people to stay away. If I had said it was immoral, they would have fought to get into the theatre.

Insincerity of censorship.

The most deplorable phase of censorship is insincerity. Cheap newspapers employ showy headlines that will sell the paper, caring little whether what they say is truth or not. I have preserved a copy of one of our prominent tabloids referring to the raid on "Sex," "The Virgin Man," and "The Captive," on the night of February 9, 1927. That evening I was attending a performance of Jane Cowl's *The Road to Rome*. I came out to the sidewalk for a breath of air after the second act. It was about ten o'clock. I purchased a copy of this tabloid describing a raid which did not take place until an hour and a half after my purchase. The paper, dated the next day, reads as follows:

LAW AND ORDER AND DECENCY SWEPT UP BROADWAY LAST NIGHT

BACKED BY THE OVERWHELMING SENTIMENT OF OUTRAGED PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND ATTACKING THE AVALANCHE OF FILTH DISPENSED ACROSS THE FOOTLIGHTS IN THE NAME OF ART — THEY DESCENDED UPON THE PURVEYORS OF 'TAINTED REALISM' WITH THE RUTHLESSNESS OF A TROPICAL HURRICANE.

The paper then gives the plots of the three plays (why, I don't know, if they were injurious to the public) and ends with an injunction to read that particular paper to keep abreast of the "movement to clean up Broadway." Now, two of the three plays concerned were devoid of any artistic value, and one of them had done such poor business that it was announced to close. Immediately upon the announcement of their "immorality," all three leapt into capacity business and turned away hundreds of disappointed "art lovers." It is my private opinion that a per-

son who goes to an immoral play *because* it is immoral doesn't need protection. He is already lacking in what the Good Book calls "virtue."

There is nothing new in any of this hysterical moral arraignment of art. In my chapter on "Sentimentalism" I mentioned Jeremy Collier's *Attack* and the false and hypocritical drama which resulted from it. If we are to avoid a repetition of that unfortunate situation, we had better adopt some more sensible method of handling matters.

Difference between morals and ethics.

I think one of the difficulties is that people do not distinguish between *morals* and *ethics*.

The word "morals" is derived from the Latin "mores," meaning customs and manners. Strictly speaking, it means the same thing today. The customs and manners of one set of people in one locality in one period have often little resemblance to the customs and manners of another set of people in another locality in another period. To illustrate, it is "immoral" in some countries for women to show their faces on the public streets, but it is quite correct for them to show their bare feet and ankles. The exact opposite is true in America. This shows morals to be a matter of *place*. Again, I doubt if twenty years ago respectable women would have gone about in our modern short skirts. Here we have morals as a matter of *period*. And again, we all know people in "another set" who do things we should not think of doing, while we do things which for them would be improper. This makes morals dependent on *social caste*. Now consider that not only in manner of living, but in matters of religion, politics, race,

and nationality, we differ from one another, and that even in the same set we psychologically differ, so that one man's meat is another man's poison. How are we ever going to achieve harmony with the world if we do not develop some degree of tolerance, some attitude which will make us true to ourselves and willing to allow others to be true to themselves?

You may ask what is to prevent people from doing evil and claiming that for them it is good. I think that another word takes care of this situation. *Ethics* is a system of universal laws founded upon universal human needs. These laws are not many, and though they have many manifestations, basically they apply to all people in all times. And strangely enough, a large number of them may be incorporated into one law which reads: *"Mind your own business."* That seems extreme; but try it out. It is, for instance, unethical to murder or steal, because in either case you are interfering with someone else's freedom and peace of living. For the same reason it is unethical to be dishonest in money matters. And when a person attempts to force his ways of living upon another, he too is unethical; for he is not "minding his own business." Great artists have always made a sharp distinction between what is termed "sins against one's neighbor" and "sins against oneself." Dante puts people guilty of the former into the lowest hells, and people guilty of the latter into milder ones. Of course, it is deplorable to see a man waste his life in dissipation or foolishness: but after all, he alone can settle his problem; it lies between him and his conscience, and ultimately he must work out his own salvation. The best we can do is give kindly counsel — or set an example by our own conduct.

Non-sex elements.

A great many people think that *sex* is the only thing to be considered in relation to morals or ethics. Professor Bliss Perry [2] speaks of the many people who are shocked "by a story that describes in plain terms the yielding of a young man to sexual temptation, but who are not shocked in the least by a story that glorifies brute force, sings the praise of war, and teaches that for the individual or the nation it is might that makes right. Yet which of these stories is really the more immoral? Which is more dangerous to the life of the Republic?"

Ethics and art.

Cosmopolitanism, which is at the base of all great art, demands that we accept the artist's picture so long as it is true to "reality." Of course, the subjects of drama are human beings in human situations; therefore, the question of ethics is indirectly involved. While an artist need not preach a sermon, and while he has the privilege of depicting characters doing unethical things, he *must not* stand behind his characters and pretend that what they do is ethical. There are always two dangers in estimating ethics in art. One is that the public may insist upon applying their own local standard of morals instead of a universal standard of ethics. The other is that the artist may be either too immature or too much obsessed by some special creed to realize larger ethical values. Personally, in my writing courses, I always discourage amateurs from the "dangerous subject." Not only are they insufficiently trained to handle it; but they have not a comprehensive grasp of life.

[2] *A Study of Prose Fiction*, p. 206–7.

Obscenity.

What is obscenity? Consider two people of the same apparent moral standing. Let each write down a list of words he considers "obscene." Then let the lists be exchanged. In each case there will be words which do not seem at all obscene to the second reader. From individual experience or imagination we give obscene connotations to words, and those connotations, more than the words themselves, shock us. Nine times out of ten, obscenity is a case of "Honi soit qui mal y pense." Of course, the artist himself may have a hand in producing an association of ideas. If you want to know what I mean, put a pair of slippers on a nude statue. That one touch of conscious, artificial covering turns the nudity into nakedness. A story illustrating this point is told about a New York art studio some twenty-five years ago. A life class was drawing a female figure. One of the class, growing tired, strolled to the window and looked down upon the street. Presently he observed a woman crossing a muddy place and raising her long skirts high enough to display her calves. "Hey, fellers!" he cried, excitedly. "Come here and look at this." The young men all rushed to the window, turning their backs on the perfectly nude model in the room with them. The reason was that the model was not for the time being a woman, but a mass of *material* cast in a certain *form* and affected by the playing of *lights* and *shadows*.

Profanity.

Profanity is at present prominent in stage censorship. Some authors insist that because certain people *are* profane, they must be so presented on the stage. This is per-

fectly true; but I notice that in many modern plays profanity is overemphasized to get a "kick" into the performance; and this, of course, is unethical and (consistently) inartistic.

On the other hand, we should remember that people are not always conscious of being profane and that their oaths expressed on the stage are not deliberate blasphemies. I have often heard rough men in lunch rooms cursing and swearing with every sentence without being aware of what their words fully meant. It was merely a trick they learned as boys because it sounded "manly." At the same time, I have heard old-fashioned people use a phrase like "Ods bodikins" without dreaming it meant "God's body" [3] and had a direct reference to the crucifixion. In like manner, "by golly," regarded by moral people as entirely harmless, really means "by God."

Vulgarity.

People who are not naturally vulgar are apt to receive distasteful impressions from vulgar words or actions. Sometimes this is justified, but often it is a super-sensitiveness which should not be encouraged, and which may be overcome. Take some word that is vulgar to you and repeat it a hundred times. It will soon cease to have any effect. This does not mean that you will have become coarsened or that you should adopt the word into your regular vocabulary. It means that you will have cured yourself of a fettish. Often we are squeamish about a perfectly legitimate word in our language because we are hyper-aesthetic, or because we have mistaken "re-finement" for culture. At one time I thought the most vulgar

[3] "by the body of Christ" (Corpus Christi).

word in the world was "louse." When I first read Robert Burns's poem *To a Louse* and realized that it contained one of my mother's favorite quotations:

> Oh wad some gift the giftie gie' us
> To see oursel's as ithers see us,

I was horrified. Today an occasional and exactly pat use of this word (particularly its adjectival form applied to some atrocious play) brings a smile to my blushless countenance. Vulgarity is not sinful. It is merely common — like onions; and similarly, it may be used with discretion.

The responsibility of the public.

Summing up the whole problem of drama censorship, I think that the matter rests ultimately with the public. *No art is one whit better than its public.* If the major portion of the people want indecent, vulgar, and unethical plays, that is what they will get; if not, no manager will waste time and money putting them on, and no playwright will bother to write them.

Sometimes the very restriction we place upon sin makes it alluring. What we think is temptation turns out to be merely curiosity. I shall never forget a lesson I received in this during my childhood. One summer I developed a strong interest in Coney Island "concert halls." They were dark, mysterious places where people sat about drinking beer and watching cheap comedians and raucus-voiced singing and dancing ladies. The street entrance was screened by a tantalizing curtain coming to within three feet of the ground. My endeavors to peer under this curtain when walking along with my father were unsatisfactory and my desire to experience the wonders within be-

came extreme. Finally, one day, my father looked at me closely. "Do you want to go in?" he asked.

"Oh yes!" My face radiated with the prospect of fulfilled ambition.

Father led me in, right up to one of the front tables. "What will you have?" he asked.

I looked at the glasses about me. "Beer!"

Father gravely ordered a glass of beer. When it arrived, it tasted "nasty," but I forced myself to drink some just as a matter of principle. The so-called "sandwich" that came with it was hard and dry, and the plate on which it rested was decidedly dirty. I nibbled, gingerly, as I watched the performance. Many of the jokes I couldn't understand, and those I could didn't seem very funny. As for the ladies! Those all so alluring creatures from the vantage point of my "peep-in" now at close range seemed sadly unglamorous. One of them, who had thrown a wrapper over her costume and was sitting at a table next us, looked under her paint and powder, like our washerwoman at home.

Father let me get my fill. In fact, it was I who, after what seemed an interminable time, had to take the initiative.

"Don't you — don't you think it's time to leave?" I asked.

"Have you had enough?"

"I think so."

Father rose and without a word, led me from the place.

A few days later he took me to a performance of "The Bohemian Girl." That charming old opera was simple and light enough for my childish appreciation. Beside it the other performance paled into nothingness. I have not to

this day been able to renew my interest in concert halls, because I have discovered something *finer*.

I am firmly convinced that if we spend more time in cultivating a genuine love of art in this country and less in prohibiting what isn't art in the first place, we shall have better ethics, better manners, and better drama.

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Chapter XIV

THE FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

I have given this heading to my final comments rather than the more impressive one, *The Theatre of the Future,* because I do not think we shall have a "new" theatre. Whatever is genuine and artistic in new discoveries will be incorporated into the theatre we already have, and the result will be more in fullness than in difference. I should like to make clear that it is you, and not the playwrights, managers, actors, or directors, who control the future of the theatre. The world never yet clamored for a hero without getting one; and the same truth applies to creative artists. Set standards high enough for such artists to follow, and the artists will appear.

The average person has little realization of the number of times a manager must say to a playwright, "I like your play. It is a splendid thing. But I cannot take a chance. The public will not stand behind me." One can hardly blame him when the cost of a dramatic production ranges from $20,000 to $200,000. On the other hand, if the public encourages those productions which are ventured, more and more will be risked, and we shall develop a really fine drama.

I can only urge that we throw ourselves constantly open to cultural stimuli, not accepting blindly but becoming *familiar.* When we can actually feel culture as living, we

shall have released it from its prison of dead highbrowism and made it a vital part of ourselves. The trouble at present is that we are not always differentiating between the false and the true. As a nation we have suffered so long from the stigma of "superficiality" that we are over-anxious to accept everything which is labeled "art." Recently a foreigner, the head of a large international mercantile association, made the statement that the first immigrants toward whom America should bar her gates are the European charlatans. These, he said, take advantage of our desire for culture and impose all sorts of silly isms and ists upon us for the purpose of lining their pockets. This man also remarked that Europe is now looking toward America for artistic fulfillment, a startling admission on the part of a continent that has previously regarded us as in the vanguard only materially.

It is a fact that artistic realization is fast becoming ours. Not only our money, but our limitless energy — the very youthful impulsiveness which makes us rush in where others would hesitate — is prompting us to seek and secure from all over the world a rich and varying culture. Few countries are so quick to assimilate as America, and even if she makes a hundred mistakes to Europe's one, she makes two hundred attempts and comes out to the good. No better example of this exists than in the theatre. What if nineteen out of twenty productions are inartistic? We have so many times twenty in the course of a season that the sum total of good plays is greater than in any European country. And it makes no difference whether the plays originate in Europe or in America. They are *here,* and all we have to do is patronize them — understandingly and sympathetically.

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